

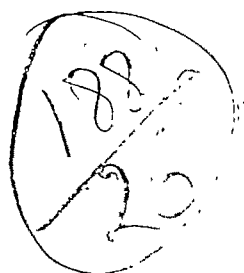
Vol. XXIV

Nos. 1 & 2

1991-92

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JOURNAL
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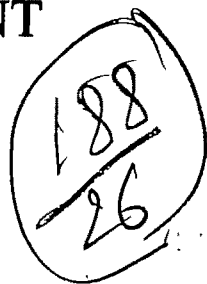
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THE JOURNAL of the Department of English, Calcutta University.

Annual Subscription : Inland : Rs. 15.00 (inclusive of postage).

Foreign : £ 3 (inclusive of postage).

Single Copy : Inland : Rs. 7.50 (exclusive of postage).

Foreign : £ 1.5 (exclusive of postage).

All materials intended for publication in this journal, books for review, business correspondence, subscriptions (Bank-drafts should be made payable to "The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, B.A. & F., Calcutta University"), reprints, journals, etc. should be addressed to :

Secretary, U.C.A.C.

(Journal & Bulletin)

Asutosh Building

Calcutta University

Calcutta-700 073

Place of Publication

Asutosh Building, Calcutta University, Calcutta-700 073

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Publisher

DILIP KUMAR MUKHERJEE

AMALENDU BOSE (1908-1991)

We deeply mourn the death of Dr. Amalendu Bose who was Sir Gooroodas Professor and Head of the Department of English, Calcutta University from 1961 till his retirement in 1973. He was the last of a line of academics who made the English Department what it is today in terms of its growth and achievement. We greatly acknowledge what Dr. Bose did to infuse young blood into the department and to modernise and restructure the syllabus.

An M.A in English, Dacca University (first in the first class). Dr. Bose went to Oxford in 1945, did research there and became D. Phil. (Oxford), in 1947.

Lecturer first in Dacca (now Dhaka) College and afterwards in Rajshahi College, Dr. Bose joined the Department of English, University of Dacca (now Dhaka) till his departure for Oxford, and rejoined his old department in Dacca. In 1948, Dr. Bose moved on to Banaras Hindu University as Assistant Professor, and from 1949 to 1961, was in the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, first as Reader and then as Professor. From 1961, till retirement 1973, he held the Sir Gooroodas Banerjee Chair in the English Language and Literature in our University. He was also visiting professor in many foreign Universities and later became National Lecturer, U.G.C., in 1972-73. Dr. Bose was member of Bharatiya Jnan Pitha and of Sahitya Akademy, among many other organisations of India and abroad. He was Honorary Secretary, Board of Editors, *The Calcutta Review*.

Venerated throughout India as scholar in English, he was also a literary critic of the first order in Bengali. But it was, above all his charismatic personality that cast a spell on successive generations of students.

NIRMALA SINHA (1902-1991)

We deeply mourn the loss of Mrs. Nirmala Sinha, the first whole-time woman lecturer in the Department of English, Calcutta University.

As teacher and administrator, Mrs. Sinha was an illustrious woman of her time. She began teaching in 1945 as lecturer in English at Women's Christian College and from 1948 to 1952 was Principal of South Calcutta Girls' College. She then moved on to Calcutta University as Inspectress of Halls and Hostels and also as part-time lecturer in the Department of English. From 1960 to 1967, Mrs. Sinha was a full-time teacher of the department.

Great-grand-daughter of Raja Radhakanta Deb, Mrs. Sinha was a favourite pupil of Professor Joygopal Banerjee, Professor P. C. Ghosh (of Presidency College), and of Professor Henry Stephen. She won the gold medal in English of this University at the M. A. Examination in 1925 — one of the first women to achieve this honour. As some of her writings indicate, she was highly knowledgeable about the education, status, and ways of life of women in Bengal from the late-nineteenth century to her own time.

Above all, Mrs. Sinha was extremely popular among students, teachers, officers, and employees of this University. With the warmth of her personality, the concern she had for every individual of her acquaintance, she drew to herself the affection and regard of all she came in touch with.

SUKUMAR SEN (1900-1992)

We deeply mourn the death also of Dr. Sukumar Sen, formerly Khaira Professor of Indian Linguistics and Phonetics of the University of Calcutta. He taught in the department of English of this University for some time, and was one of the greatest scholars of Indology in this sub-continent.

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T. S. ELIOT'S NOVEL - CRITICISM

PRAKASH DESHPANDE

T. S. ELIOT'S novel-criticism like his poetry and drama-criticisms is largely a workshop criticism that seems to justify his creative strategies he was experimenting with. Consequently, there is enough evidence of Eliot's prejudices, his likes and dislikes as well as his preferences that are, indeed, precious signals of the process of a literary activity. It is not a comprehensive statement on either the English or the American novel as there are obvious gaps along with some understandable blanks. It does not have any strict academic framework as it dwells at random on various aspects of the novel. Still very surprisingly it seems to point at the very essence of a novelist's vision. And in spite of its limitations its range and variety is astonishing. It is rather regrettable that commentators on the English and American novel have rarely taken a serious cognizance of Eliot's novel-criticism. The present essay is an humble attempt at giving a relatively composite picture, an over-all survey but not an interpretation, of Eliot's novel-criticism which might be useful to such commentators.

Eliot did not try his hand at the novel but throughout his career he had been cautiously watching the development of the novel as a form. He knew the novel to be the most dominant form of his times and very attentively observed the various experiments his contemporary novelists were making. It was Eliot's conviction that a poet should be actively aware of the development of prose around him which would only keep his poetry alive. True to his master Ezra Pound's maxim that 'poetry should be as well written as prose' Eliot admired the process of a creative interaction between prose and poetry. Therefore, he kept alive his interest in the novel which was a dominant prose form in his times. In doing so he established a dialogue with the novelists that suited his creative temperament and condemned those that did not share his concerns.

The earliest evidence of Eliot's active engagement with the novel is the syllabus of Modern French Literature that he prepared for the Oxford University Extension Course in 1916 which included a study of the French novel.¹ So Eliot's fascination for the French models is evident in his novel-criticism. He places the English Victorian novelists far below Stendhal and Flaubert. The author of *Amos Barton* is more serious than Dickens and the author of *La Chartreuse de Parme* is more serious than either.² Yet Eliot likes Dickens as he is a "visual writer".³ In "Wilkie Collins and Dickens" (1927), Eliot argues that Dickens's figures belong to poetry "in that a single phrase, either by them or about them, may be enough to set them wholly before us".⁴ In his "Preface to *Babu of Montparnasse*" (1932), he mentions Dickens's "pathos that trembles on the edge of the maudlin".⁵ Eliot blames Philippe for the absence of 'any religious or humanitarian zeal' present in Dickens.⁶ To Eliot, Dickens's Little Nelly and Little Emily are not "so moving" as the Chancery prisoner in *Pickwick*, "of whom is said finally, he has got his discharge, by God!"⁷ Thus, Eliot frequently refers to Dickens in his early criticism. To Eliot, Henry James's Mr. Striker (*Roderick Hudson*) is "too suggestive of Martin Chuzzlewit,"⁸ and that Henry Adams "remains little Paul Dombey asking questions".⁹ In "Yeats" (1940), Eliot admires "the force of character by which Dickens, having exhausted his inspiration, was able in middle age to proceed to such a masterpiece so different from his early work as *Bleak House*".¹⁰ In "Christopher Marlowe" (1919), Eliot laments over "the old English humour, the terribly serious, even savage comic humour, the humour which spent its last breath in the decadent genius of Dickens."¹¹

Eliot showed considerable interest in Thomas Hardy as well. Eliot's first published criticism of any prose fiction was a review of a book on the Wessex novels. Eliot blames Hardy for "the lack of a sense of humour."¹² Eliot is critical of novels like *Far From the Madding Crowd* which he says contained a "deliberately faked" scene, but at the time of Hardy's death, Eliot paid him a warm tribute by saying that if any man was ever worthy to be buried in the Abbey on grounds of literary greatness alone [it is] "the author of *The Dynasts*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (his finest

novel as a whole), and *A Group of Noble Dames*.”¹³ Likewise, Eliot pays a warm tribute to Joseph Conrad by calling him “beyond question a great novelist”, who “possessed the modesty and the conviction which a great writer should have”.¹⁴

Eliot's criticism of D.H. Lawrence is an interesting combination of appreciation and condemnation. Ranging over a large period of time it shows a dynamic flexibility in Eliot's views. In *Dial* (1922), Eliot calls Lawrence “the most interesting novelist in England” affected by Dostoevsky and appreciates the wholeness of *Sons and Lovers*.¹⁵ Eliot's complaint is that Lawrence “theorizes at times when he should merely see”, but he excuses Lawrence for a fine scene in *Aaron's Rod* where there is “a dialogue between an Italian and several Englishmen”.¹⁶ In “American Critics” (1929), He calls Lawrence's book on American literature “the most brilliant book” but condemns it for being “fragmentary, prejudiced, unbalanced” and “sometimes completely misleading”.¹⁷ To Eliot, Lawrence's Essay on Fenimore Cooper is “the best thing ever written on Cooper” but “he is by no means so inspired about Poe and Hawthorne”.¹⁸ In a review in *Criterion* (1931), Eliot takes a survey of Lawrence's career. He appreciates “magnificent descriptions” and “marvellous passages” found throughout Lawrence's work where Lawrence “gets out of himself and inside other people”.¹⁹ There is, he says, “a fine episode in the life of an Elementary school mistress in the *Rainbow*; there are one or two remarkable dialogues in *Aaron's Rod*; and there is a short story called *Two Blue Birds* which has no relation to Lawrence's own emotional disease and in which he states a situation which no one else has ever put”.²⁰ In spite of these merits, Eliot blames Lawrence for his undue “craving for greater intimacy” and “over intellectualized nature”.²¹ Lawrence lacked “Christian discipline and asceticism” and therefore relapsed into “pride and hatred”.²² In *After Strange Gods* (1934), Eliot calls Lawrence “an almost perfect example of the heretic”.²³ In “To Criticize the Critic” (1961), he describes *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as “a book of most serious and highly moral intention” and adds: But my antipathy to the author remains, on the ground of what seems to me egotism, a strain of cruelty, and a failing in common with Thomas Hardy — the lack of a sense of humour”.²⁴ In the Foreword to Father William Tiverton's book *D.*

H. Lawrence and Human Experience (1961), Eliot again reviews Lawrence's life and work and expresses a need to approach Lawrence's work without a biographical interest. But here again Eliot is critical of Lawrence and calls him "an impatient and impulsive man".⁸⁵ To Eliot, Lawrence was often wrong from "ignorance, prejudice, or drawing the wrong conclusions in his conscious mind from the insights which came to him from below consciousness; and it will take time to dissociate the superficial error from the fundamental truth".⁸⁶ Eliot, however, thought that Lawrence was "primarily and always religious".⁸⁷

Eliot also watched James Joyce's novelistic career very closely, as Joyce shared his modernistic concerns. In a London letter to *Dial* (1921), Eliot admires Joyce's "great constructive ability" and thinks that "it is the structure which gives his later work its unique and solitary value".⁸⁸ In another letter to *Dial* (1922), Eliot writes about *Ulysses*: "It is at once the exposure and the burlesque of that of which it is the perfection".⁸⁹ In "Contemporary English Prose" (1923), Eliot calls Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* "the work of a disciple of Walter Pater as well as of Cardinal Newman".⁹⁰ Eliot severely condemns Walter Pater for his "ascetic epicureanism" and the blame naturally descends upon Joyce. Fortunately, according to Eliot, in *Ulysses* the current disappears. So Eliot thinks that *Ulysses* "is not so distinctly a precursor of a new epoch as it is a gigantic culmination of an old".⁹¹ Eliot's admiration for the novel continues in his "A Preface to Modern Literature" (1923) where he calls *Ulysses* "a book so significant in the history of the English language that it must take its place as a part of the tradition of that language. Such a book not only realizes untried possibilities in a language, but revivifies the whole of the past".⁹² In "Milton-1" (1936), Eliot compares Joyce's style with Milton's and asserts that "Joyce's imagination is not naturally so purely auditory a type as Milton's".⁹³ Eliot finds in Joyce's early work even "visual and other imagination of the highest kind".⁹⁴ In "Frontiers of Criticism" (1936), calling Joyce "a man of genius and a personal friend", Eliot criticizes *Finnegans Wake* bitterly. To Eliot, this "monstrous masterpiece" is "without elaborate explanation, merely beautiful nonsense"; it is "obscure", and requires a "sort of dissection for its enjoyment and

understanding".³⁵ In the Preface to *Introducing James Joyce* (1942), the story *The Dead* is Eliot's choice. And "the family party scene from *A Portrait* with its bitter quarrel over Parnell", Eliot writes, "is executed with the same realism that we find throughout *Dubliners*".³⁶

Next to Joyce, Wyndham Lewis is Eliot's favourite prose writer. In his discussion of the development of English prose in "Contemporary English Prose" (1923), Eliot devotes an entire section to Lewis. Of Lewis's prose Eliot writes: "It has an abundant vigour, a living significance, a vituperation for which I find no other parallels. Mr. Lewis can use words with the fluency of a Falstaff."³⁷ Eliot admires Lewis for his British humour which is "so serious and savage" and for his "imagination which is primarily visual".³⁸ Eliot does not think the novel *Tarr* to be representative of Lewis because his style in it is "still imperfect and unfinished".³⁹ On Lewis's untimely death Eliot paid him a warm tribute. He calls Lewis "a great satirist" who was "incomparably witty and amusing in company, with the same gift of phrase in conversation as is found in his writings".⁴⁰ Moreover, his wit has no "savour of matic", and his criticism was "impartial".⁴¹ Still Eliot has frank preferences among Lewis's work. *The Red Priest* is "inferior", and *Tarr* is "not altogether satisfying composite of satire and tragedy". He prefers *Rotting Hill* and *The Writer and the Absolute*, but chiefly *Self Condemned* and *Monstre Gal*. According to Eliot, In *Self Condemned* Lewis wrote "a novel of almost unbearable poignancy".⁴²

H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett are not Eliot's favourites. He blames them for they encouraged what Eliot calls "an industrious, popular and rather vulgar super-journalism".⁴³ He thinks that they have had "a combined influence toward the vulgarization of literature".⁴⁴ In a review in *Criterion* (1927), Eliot denies Wells a "historical mind" or "the understanding of history" and remarks that Wells does not possess "a degree of culture, civilization and maturity".⁴⁵ In his introduction to *The Sacred Wood* (1920), Eliot ironically remarks that the proper role of Wells and Chesterton was to set "the house in order" and that "they have done well for themselves in laying literature aside".⁴⁶ In "Rudyard Kipling" (1941), again, Eliot regrets that Wells's political opinions "changed

but did not mature".⁴⁸ That Eliot took notice of dominating figures like Wells is not surprising but it is certainly striking to note that he seriously watched the experiments of minor novelists like Miss May Sinclair. Eliot criticizes her style which is "almost exaggerated in its bareness and simplicity". She seems to devote "real care" to her "vocabulary" and "syntax", and has made great use of the "results of psychoanalysis". But according to Eliot, such style does not "represent any direction".⁴⁹

The most interesting feature of Eliot's accounts of the novel is his taste for detective fiction. Eliot reviewed many murder stories and his criticism of detective fiction has a serious critical motive behind it. Eliot did not condemn popular literature but tried to understand the forces behind them. It was also an intelligent way of knowing the mass mind. Eliot knew the complex relationship between popular and serious literature. In a despatch to the *Dial* (1923) Eliot remarks: "Fine art is the refinement, not the anti-thesis, of popular art".⁵⁰ In detective fiction Eliot's model is Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone* because, according to Eliot the typical English detective story is "in some important respects a sport".⁵¹ It is free from the influence of Poe and Sherlock Holmes. Eliot appreciates Poe's *Gold Bug*, because there is "nothing sham or mysterious" but the "legitimate intellectual exercise". In the same way in *Moonstone* "the Indian business... is perfectly within the bounds of reason".⁵² In "Recent Detective Fiction" (1927), Eliot states that he likes a detective story "to have the pleasure of following the working of one keen mind", and appreciates the "real keenness of wit" of Poe's *Monsieur Dupin*. According to Eliot, "modern detective fiction in general is weak in that it falls between two opposite tasks. It has neither the austerity, the pure intellectual pleasure of Poe's *Marie Roget*, nor has it the fullness and abundance of life of Wilkie Collins". Detective writers should concentrate either on "the detective interest" or on "the characters as human beings".⁵³ In his Introduction to Charles Williams's *All Hollow's Eve* (1948), Eliot compares Williams's stories with those of Chesterton, Poe, De La Mare and Stevenson. Chesterton, in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, gives you "ideas" rather than "feelings" of another world; Poe is at his best in *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *Legeia* because "the symbolism of nightmare

has its reference in the psychological ailment of Poe, which is itself a serious matter"; De La Mare "gives you a perception of something which you can interpret as you please"; and in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, "the literary craftsmanship is too obviously the manipulator of the scene". But the stories of Charles Williams are not "woven out of morbid psychology" as Poe's or "intended to teach the reader," like Chesterton's. There is no "exploitation of the supernatural for the sake of the immediate shudder".⁵⁴

Of Paul Bourget's novels Eliot writes that his successful novels derive from the "talent of analysis in company with the talent of curiosity", but in *Lazarine*, the sense of curiosity has evaporated and only analysis remains.⁵⁵ Eliot exposes a number of "inconsistencies and illogicalities" in Sherlock Holmes and sees him as a mere "formula... not even a good detective". Holmes has no "rich humanity", no "knowledge of the human heart", and none of the "reality in any great characters" which one finds in Dickens or Thackeray or George Eliot.⁵⁶

Eliot's criticism of American novelists shows his modernistic preferences. Those who have transcended the provincial element and narrow localization are his favourites. In "A Preface to Modern Literature" (1923) Eliot argues that "there are several able novelists of local interests" but they are of "no interest abroad". So he prefers Hawthorne who "gets New England" and Henry James who "gets a larger part of America" but their contemporaries hardly get "anything above a village or two, or a Jungle".⁵⁷ But in spite of Eliot's reservations about the American scene in general he is appreciative of the great American novelists. He seems to have had a high regard for Hawthorne. He prefers *The Scarlet Letter* to *Adam Bede* and admires Hawthorne's concern for "the deeper psychology".⁵⁸ According to Eliot, "Neither Dickens nor Thackeray certainly had the smallest notion of this; George Eliot had a kind of heavy intellect for it..."⁵⁹ Eliot's remark that "Hawthorne grasped character through a relation of two or more persons to each other, and this is what no one else except James had done" is a great compliment.⁶⁰ As Lyndall Gordon points out, the strain Eliot admired in the New England writers, Hawthorne

and James, was their "exceptional awareness of spiritual reality", their "profound sensitiveness to good and evil" and their "extraordinary power to convey horror".⁶¹

Eliot's fascination for Henry James is for the latter's less American and more European personality. Henry James transcended American provincialism and occupied a place among the European novelists. Naturally, he was something like a model for Eliot. Again, Henry James's loyalties were with the French tradition, the tradition that Eliot cherished throughout his career. Paying a tribute to Henry James (1918), Eliot writes that James "had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it". Most of us "corrupt our feelings with ideas; we produce the public, the political, the emotional idea evading sensation and thought". But James, in his novels, "is maintaining a point of view, a view point untouched by the parasite idea. He is the most intelligent man of his generation"⁶² In "A Prediction" (1924), Eliot devoted a large section to the discussion of Henry James's life and work. Eliot insists that James must be read as a whole. Very strangely Eliot justifies James's romanticism: his romanticism implied no defeat in observation of the things that he wanted to observe; it was not the romanticism of those who dream because they are too lazy or too fearful to face the fact; it issues, rather, from the imperative insistence of an ideal which tormented him. He was possessed by the vision of an ideal society, he *saw* (not fancied) the relation between the members of such a society. But at the same time he showed the awareness of the "disparity between possibility and fact". Eliot is all praise for "an integrity so great, a vision so exacting, that it was forced to the extreme of care and punctiliousness for exact expression". Comparing James's world with that of Dostoevsky, Eliot thinks that the "spirit of James, so much less violent, with so much more reasonableness and so much more resignation than that of the Russian, is no less profound, and is more useful, more applicable, for our future".⁶³ Indeed, Eliot's preference for Henry James as against Dostoevsky is understandable but his rating of James higher than Dostoevsky is not acceptable when one considers the range and depth of Dostoevsky's novelistic vision.

Like Hawthorne and Henry James, Mark Twain is Eliot's favourite. In his "Introduction" to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1950) Eliot discusses Mark Twain's novelistic vision at large. The pessimism in Mark Twain's *The Man who Corrupted Hedleyburg* and *What is Man* was not acceptable to Eliot, as he felt that the pessimism "springs less from observation of society, than from his hatred of himself for allowing society to tempt and corrupt him and give him what he wanted"; and Eliot's conclusion is that "there is no wisdom in it". Eliot's response to *Huck Finn* is favourable; he found a value in Huck's detachment and passivity: "Huck is passive and impassive, apparently always the victim of events; and yet, in his acceptance of his world of what it does to him and others, he is more powerful than his world, because he is more aware than any other person in it". Eliot compares Twain's world with Conrad's and says that in the worlds of both the novelists one comes across "the power and terror of nature", the "isolation", and "feebleness" of man. Eliot rates Mark Twain higher than Conrad: "Conrad remains always the European observer of the tropics, the white man's eye contemplating the Congo and its black gods. But Mark Twain is a native, and the River God is his God".⁶⁴

As Eliot's novel-criticism shows his intelligent acquaintance with the French, the English, and the American novelists, it is also evident of his indepth familiarity with the Russian masters like Dostoevsky and Turgenev. Eliot's analysis and evaluation of Dostoevsky discussed above show his rare insights. As one can relate Eliot's darker vision to Dickens its connections with Dostoevsky's vision can also be explored. Lyndall Gordon points out that during his stay in Paris Eliot read Dostoevsky in French translation. According to her, Eliot learned from Dostoevsky to exploit personal problems in his writing. He saw how Dostoevsky's epilepsy and hysteria "cease to be defects of an individual and become — as fundamental weakness can, given the ability to face it and study it — the entrance to a genuine and personal universe".⁶⁵ Eliot's kinship with Turgenev was a natural affinity for a writer living abroad and for latter's cosmopolitan vision. Eliot had also a great fascination for Turgenev's artistic philosophy: Turgenev's

intelligence was "vigilant" but never "theoretic". In the same way "his austere art of omission was most satisfying to the civilized mind". Turgenev's novels maintain a fine balance between "the seriousness of life" and "the seriousness of art".⁶⁶

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“ ‘TWIXT THE DANGEROUS SHORES” :
THE WORLD OF SHAKESPEARE’S *TROILUS & CRESSIDA*

TAPATI GUPTA

EVER-CHANGING conditions and defunct codes frustrate all attempts at self-assessment ; it even forces the individual to compromise with an inexorable reality at the cost of self-fulfilment. This is the final impression left by Shakespeare’s *Troilus & Cressida*.¹ It portrays a historical-social situation dominated by flux and knotted to non-functional values, leading to a bifold concept of identity : the self clinging to fixity and the self swayed by flux. Hence our feeling of perplexity, even fear, at the conclusion of the play which may appropriately be called Shakespeare’s dark tragedy.

Epic pretensions appear inane. Behaviour becomes paradoxically both individualistic and uncreative, even degenerate self-identity is lost in a strained attempt to serve a cause of doubtful importance. Values appear relative and the conception of greatness is drenched in impermanence. The background of mobility of instability necessitates fresh alignments of the self. Tempest-tossed on a sea of self-abuse, inner-anarchy and tension, the protagonists never seem to strike firm ground. Even at the conclusion they are dwelling on the quicksand of here and now.

Ulysses seems to have found a standard of permanent reference in Degree. But Degree is subverted by expediency when he rigs the lottery² (I ; iii) and sets Ajax against Hector. Ulysses shrewdly builds up for Ajax a sort of sham identity as a contingency measure. Flattery inflates Ajax’s ego till he begins to think himself superior to Achilles. Ultimately however even policy and statecraft are toppled by the unexpected turn of events. Achilles is roused to action by Patroclus’s sudden death and not by Ulyssean strategy. All human decision and action prove provisional in this bewildering whirligig.

In the world of this drama an artificial situation prevails : the outcome of over-sophistication. Human behaviour has become primarily social and soul-confining. Ulysses’s image of time as a host bidding a hasty farewell to the parting guest (III, iii, 165)

illustrates the stylized social behaviour emphasized throughout the play and reinforces the senses of superficiality and ephemerality of civil and heroic etiquette. The long-drawn battle, the near-eternal siege generate materialism, spiritual malaise and ennui: breed an inner insurrection, that batters down the little state of man. His search for self is constantly baffled.

In the Elizabethan context identity includes the idea of perfect balance between a man's public and private selves. In *Troil & Cress.*, Shakespeare portrays the dichotomy between the private and public worlds through repeated references to arming and unarming, going to battle and resting. What we have here is a chain of identity-crises.

Troilus finds himself opposed to the martial mood when he seeks to define himself as a lover. In a stylized dialogue with the self, he spells out his withdrawal from the outside world:

But I am weaker than a woman's tear
Tamer than sheep, fonder than ignorance,
Less valiant than the virgin in the night,
And skillness as unpractis'd infancy.³

(I, i, 9-32)

Yet Troilus's spiritual enlightenment through love remains an unrealized possibility. We find his love crudely associated with sexuality in his dialogues with Pandorus.⁴ Moreover Pandarus's presence in the love-scenes punctuates Troilus's idealism with a touch of the heady materialistic temper of his milieu.

The war generates a hankering for material stability and practicalness: The general feeling of insecurity occasions the visual images of the human body, mangled or whole. For instance, "This hand is Grecian all/And this is Trojan; the sinews of this leg/All Greek, and this all Troy;/My mother's blood/Runs on the dexter cheek" (Hector to Ajax in IV, v, 125-128); "I have with exact view perused thee, Hector/And quoted joint by joint" (Achilles to Hector, IV, v, 232-233); "I will the second time,/As I would buy thee, view thee limb by limb" (IV, v, 237-238); "... with his mangled Myrmidons/That noseless, handless, hacked and chipped" (V, v, 33-34).

The looming holocaust of physical extermination cuts across all idealism. Beauty is perceived mainly in terms of the body.

Physical pleasure gets top priority and Pandarus's crude comments underline love-making rather than love. Ironically, the language Troilus uses to elevate Cressida makes her a commercial commodity, a pearl to reach whom Troilus the merchant (I, i, 99-103) needs a sailing Pandar. In the Jacobean context this may indicate the growing influence of capitalism. In the context of this play the references to trade connote the motive of pragmatic exchange; the prosaic political cause behind the strife. A Helen for a Hesione, a Cressid for an Antenor. Such a prosaic motive however is not enough to justify the quantity of bloodshed. Hence the gory affair is plugged on to absolute values like Degree and Honour. Against such fixed norms human conduct and state policy are assessed and determined.

In I, iii, the great Greek heroes discuss the present contingency. Their argument is based on the premise of a given fixed condition of settled values which is in fact antithetical to the present actuality. The approach is notional, unpragmatic, static. To them war is a concept which should evoke similar responses, based on ideal principles of heroship, from different individuals. The idea of an evolving and unique relationship of the self with changing sets of circumstances does not occur, yet this is what is required at the moment. The language register is likewise full of certitude and tautology; anachronistic and stagnant even as the heroes are. Their unempirical values seem ready to dissolve in the whirlpool of flux.

The more pragmatic Ulysses probes deeper into the Greek distemper and finds a cause in "neglection of degree" (I, iii, 127). By doing so, he too no doubt owes allegiance to order and certitude; yet he is more aware of the quality of the time than the others. Hence his language is moulded to the animal temper of destruction and hedonism.

Then everything includes itself in power,
power into will, will into appetite,
And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey,
And lust eat up himself.

(I, iii, 119 - 124)

Emotionally related to his thought, he is heroic in his visualization of discord :

... the bounded waters
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe.

(I, iii, 111 - 113)

The image of the hive he uses symbolizes an absolute regal power and a mysteriously self-regulating social order. It remains the traditional ideal against which anarchy is measured.

Ulysses's mental acumen however operates within the narrow confines of the immediate political crisis. Unlike Vincento and Prospero, the recognized Shakespearean stage managers, Ulysses does not attempt to lead others to self-enlightenment or harmony. His moral and social awareness is uninformed by any reformist aims but is made to serve purely utilitarian purposes, as we have already noted. In him one finds a conflict of theory and practice. Although he values the "still and mental parts" he directs his energies towards temporal action. He unwittingly proves the hollowness of such stolid fixtures against the prevailing laxity.

Ulysses's reasoning is 'a priori.' Degree is assumed to exist permanently and immutably. This leads to a non-recognition of dynamism, of the deeper reaches of the soul and a skindEEP analysis of the Greek condition. He over-simplifies the cause behind Achilles's sloth by deducing it merely as disrespect for his betters. Neither Ulysses nor any of the other great generals do what the Trojans do in the council scene. They do not question whether in this war the cause matches the effect. Patroclus's mimicry of the great leaders is an effective burlesque on the situation.

Burlesque recurs in Thersites's reference to "the eye of Helen's needle." Thersites no doubt is infected by the boil with the "botchy core" (II, i. 4-6) that spreads contagion like the plague. But his string of abuse does create the required verbal and visual pattern defining the general atmosphere. "Dog", "cur", "red murrain", "mongrel and beef-witted", "jade", "bitch-worf's son" roughcast over the Latinisms in Agamemnon's speech: "protractive", "tortive", "conflux" and "persistive" (I, iii. 1-30).

Thersites debunks heroic qualities. Pandarus's comments underline the crude materialism of the time. They themselves are wallowing in the slushy quagmire of degeneration.

Unlike the Greeks the Trojans, especially Hector, try to determine the true nature of the combat. Does the cause merit the amount of destruction? Like Ulysses, Hector too relies on an absolute norm: reason. But unlike 'Degree' Hector's reason is more relevant to the situation; more inductive than *a priori*: he evaluates history by the result. "Let Helen go", says Hector, and Priam and Helenus second him. "Brother, she is not worth what she doth cost / The keeping" (II. ii. 51-52) and "Hector's opinion / Is this in way of truth" (II. iii. 188-189). The dispassionate language spells social responsibility. His *volte face* at the end of the scene therefore appears disconcerting. He subjugates the universal more of reason to Troilus's chivalric code of honour and personal glory. In fact it is revealed that he has already sent a "roisting challenge" to the Greeks. The debate on Helen's intrinsic value remains suspended. Hector too submits to the prevalent ethic of action. Reason becomes allied to a fossilized code. "Keep Helen still; / For'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence / upon our joint and several dignities." (II. ii. 193) But the hurly-burly of flux batters down all values. At the end of the play Hector is found widely pursuing a well-armoured foe, crudely hunting for his "hide." Even the righteous Hector curtsies to the god of appetite, thirsts for acts of mere valour, compromises with the acquisitive, unrefined aspect of the time. As does Troilus the idealist.

In spite of repeated attempts to distance himself from reality Troilus's identity as lover and warrior is moulded by the materialistic ethos. Ironically enough he oscillates between allegiance to stagnant norms and dynamic flux. Imperfect cross-hatching of the two attitudes results in a disorganized self-image.

Troilus likes to imagine both Helen and Cressida as jewels, eternally brilliant. Honour is a fixture that cannot be remodelled. Hector at least displays a more dynamic attitude by seeking to organize time and history into a unity with a beginning, middle and end: Helen must return and the war stop. But Troilus would prolong the moment of national crisis. Lives lost are

nothing if the object is a pearl, the market-value of which is relative: "What is aught, but as 'tis valued"? But the price of Helen is determined on an ascending scale because of the increasing number of lives lost in keeping her. This inverted logic blinds him to the fact that Helen has wrought moral and physical bankruptcy upon the nation. Troilus vows to fight to "glory" for her and be "canonized" by posterity. Here is a great confusion in concepts, an attempt to extract permanent significance from a flux-oriented, debased political condition, the slushy marshland of a befouled milieu. Can the idealist avoid treading the ooze?

Troilus makes the fallacious choice of making the will determine the election or rejection of a wife.

... I take today a wife, & my election
Is led on in the conduct of my will ;
My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,
Two trod pilots' twixt the dangerous shores
Of will and judgment : how may I avoid
Although my will distaste what I elected,
The wife I chose.

II. ii 61 - 67

Although he displays a fatuous individualism, Troilus's language shows his subconscious alignment with the current trends of sensuality and commercialism. Even Helen, the "theme of honour and renown" is paralleled with an edible and marketable substance. The materialistic atmosphere of the play world as well as the growing mood of capitalism is re-inforced in :

We turn not back the silks upon the merchant
When we have soil'd them ; nor the-remainder viands
We do not throw in unrespective sieve.
Because we now are full.

II. ii 69 - 72

Yet Troilus the lover is capable of acute self-analysis, sensitive and creative.

I am giddy, expectation whirls me round.
Th' imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense ...

III. ii 17 - 19

A utilitarian temper however underscores his refinement with a heady epicureanism :

... What will it be
When that the wat'ry palate tastes indeed
Love's thrice-repured nectar ? ...

III. ii. 17 - 19

The world of *Troil & Cress.* presents a nightmarish chiaroscuro of furore and uncertainty which hardly leaves any room for spiritual fulfilment. Here everyone keeps asking everyone else the new news of the battlefield : "Was Hector armed and gone ere you came to Ilium ?" (I ii. 48) ; "Who's afield today, ?" (III. i 128) ; "What exploit's in hand ?" (III. i. 76) ; "I long to hear how they sped today." (III. i. 135). Against this background of maddening action Pandarus's directive to Troilus sounds natural. "Words pay no debts, give her deeds," says Pandarus. Love becomes an act of fiscal exchange which Troilus no doubt approves. With Pandarus as his Charron he would, "wallow in the lily beds" (III. ii 10-12). Love is no transcendental journey through fair fields of asphodel. It is a dive into the nether world. Troilus's total identity as lover and hero is cruelly curtailed by exigent circumstance.

Cressida on the other hand consciously attunes herself to her milieu and wilfully adjusts to change against which she is helpless. Both Helen and Cressida emblemize man's helplessness against circumstance. The former could, like Euripedes's Helen, impute her fate to "adverse fortune only". She shares the general air of levity and voluptuousness.

In Cressida however there are flashes of poetry, a healthy apprehension of fundamentals :

But the strong base and building of my love
Is as the very centre of the earth,
Drawing all things to it.

IV, ii. 102 - 104

She understands the principle of co-operation necessary for a complementary relationship. In III., ii, the Troilus - Cressida relationship promises perfect rapport. Both the lovers parley in the same vein. Cressida wittily adapts herself to Troilus's diction :

Troilus : We will not name desert before
his birth, and being born ...

III. ii. 91 - 92

time". Cressida's adjustment to the pressure of immediacy being more open-eyed, a part of herself, the most frivolous part, is preserved. Her more inward self, that only Troilus could perhaps have reached, dies for ever, even to herself. Cressida's reply to Troilus's emotional farewell in IV. ii is therefore curt but apt for a world in which love has to be justified by arguments of intrinsic and relative worth. In IV, iv, Cressida overtly adapts herself to the carnal levity of an insecure existence! "A woeful Cressid 'mongst the merry Greeks".

Cressida's public role begins in IV, v, when Ulysses proposes that Cressida be "kissed in general" in the merriest Greek fashion. She becomes almost a non-person, a state property. Even Calchas, her father, encourages her to meet Diomedes, thus diplomatically urging her to make her fortune in an opportunistic world. There is no emotive representation of the father-daughter relationship. In this world there is no scope for subjectivism or privacy. Communication becomes entirely and superficially physical.

Shakespeare's *Troil. & Cress.* in spite of its medieval and Renaissance context is surprisingly modern in temper. To a late twentieth century reader Cressida may become the epitome of modern sensibility where short-term human relationship is concerned. Her mobility is a means of escape from the stagnation of an effete existence. Man today is faced with multiple situations which increase the number of roles he has to play. To cope with the accelerated rate of change one needs to be highly adaptive and agreeable to tentative relationships; to readily dis-relate oneself from the past and understand transience as part of the modern predicament.⁵

Troil & Cress impresses upon us a grim, dark sketch of time as unrelenting flux and the self as confused debris. Relativity here contains but little reason. It chaperons anarchy, intellectual, emotional and physical. Helen is both "a theme of honour" and a "theme of all our scorns. Cressida belongs to Troilus, and everybody, and Diomedes. Helen is Menelaus's and Paris's and sometimes cruelly coupled with Pandarus's or Troilus's name (III, i). In this war-infected society self-unity is lost and essence fights a losing battle with existence while ideals linger in sadly ineffectual concepts.

The multiple perspective presented by V, ii, is unique in Shakespeare's dramaturgy as an apt visual equivalent of the problems related to fluidity, disunity and relativity. With Diomedes and Cressida in the foreground, Ulysses and Troilus watching them from a distance and Thersites lurking in the background unnoticed by the others, the drama appears what may be termed a 'multiplicity play' on the analogy of R. B. Heilman's description of Sartre's *The Reprieve* as a 'multiplicity novel'.⁶ The scene projects in near-simultaneous fashion the different reactions of three different people: Troilus is passionate; Ulysses is practical; and Thersites rails as usual. This play within the play concretizes Shakespeare's detachment.

Troilus's confused apprehension of essence and existence, the polarity in his own ideas regarding human personality, his inability to conceive identity as a wholeness comprising the outer and inner worlds and moderated by experience, all this and more are now manifest. Cressida to him has so far been an idealized entity. Now that she submits to the event he would rather "think this not Cressid" (V, ii, 131) or else all womanhood is soiled. To him she has become a non-identity, a partitioned being, creature of flux and relativity: "this is, and is not, Cressid," (Ibid, 144); it is "Diomed's Cressida," (ibid, 135). He suffers an emotional mutiny:

"Bifold authority! where reason can revolt
Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
Without revolt."

V. ii. 142 - 144

Troilus makes the foolish attempt to celebrate a matter that is actually related to the heart. Even as Cressida falls a prey to the moment Troilus tries to adapt to his milieu by assuming a detached intellectual stance and deliberate shunning of sentiment: "If there be rule in unity itself,/This is not she." The image is curiously opaque and stark in which he renders her disunity:

a thing disparate
Divides more wider than the sky and earth;
And yet the spacious breadth of this division
Admits no orifice for a point as subtle
As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.

V. ii. 146 - 150

Troilus misunderstands both himself and Cressida. He tends to confuse the intellectual, physical and emotional-affective areas of human personality. It is Cressida's tragedy that Troilus comprehends only a part of her, the part that agrees with his ideal, however illusory that may be ; while Diomedes exploits that bit of her that responds to his lust. A victim of the peculiar socio-political situation, her victimization however is less tragic than Troilus's compromise because she is conceived as less sensitive and more responsive to necessity. Right from the outset we find that she is sensually alive to the fun of being loved, and readily subscribing to Pandarus's bawdy. Her love has been confined to a narrow area of sexuality excluding any recognition of the sublime heights that even sexual intensity may reach : "Women are angels, wooing ; things won are done ; joy's soul lies in the doing." After all, her response to Troilus's poetry and idealism has been but partial and always aided by Troilus's submission to the world of physicality. Cressida assents to the ethic of action zestfully. Her response to reality, as symbolized by the knocking that intrudes upon their night of love (I, V, vii), is complete and conscious.

Diomedes too is geared to the world of flux. Not unaware of the lack of social and moral worth in Helen, he nevertheless adjusts to the present emergency. Suppressing his moral or critical self, he serves a disgraceful cause in a public capacity. This matter-of-fact scorner of the emotions makes his cynicism felt even in his private encounters. "When I am hence, I'll answer to my lust" (IV, iv, 130-131), he tells the grief-struck Troilus while escorting away his Cressida ; and further adds that "to her own worth/She shall be priz'd" (*Ibid.* 132-33). The modern post-war generation, with a lump in its throat, will understand this hard-edged concession to reality.

Even the other great Greek heroes, those with their sublime ideals, are driven by the *zeitgeist*. So Nestor becomes pragmatic when he recommends 'fraction' (II, iii, 94-95) between Ajax and Thersites. Ulysses's language smacks crude : "Shall the proud lord/That bastes his arrogance with his own seam ..." (*Ibid.* 179-80). Sexual imagery, so common in the play, appear in their most serious counsel :

He that meets Hector issues from our choice ;
 And choice, being mutual act of all our souls,
 Makes merit her election, and doth boil,
 As 'twere from forth us all, a man distill'd
 Out of our virtues ; who miscarrying,

I. iii. 347 - 351

Achilles is the one character in the play who flouts convention and is both literally and figuratively "tented" in a private world of friendship and love. Yet ironically, even these positive sentiments are figured forth as unnatural and aberrant⁷ so that they become uncreative and soul-constricting. A nescient darkness obstructs enlightenment.

Yet Achilles is acutely aware of social conditions. Although his disquisition on "butterflies," those good-weather friends, is cliché, it shows his sense of distinction between the outer and inner life. He talks of self-knowledge when he says

For speculation turns not to itself
 Till it hath travell'd and is mirrored there
 Where it may see itself.

III. iii. 109 - 111

Ironically enough, Achilles's perception of essence as opposed to existence, his isolation, is interpreted as pride by Ulysses. A pride that leads to sloth, which in turn breeds insolence. It leads to maladjustment on the public as well as personal planes. Achilles's life-style is decadent : "He is so plagney proud that the death-tokens of it/Cry No recovery" (II, iii, 172-73). His pride is non-integral to the inner self ; it leads only to confusion. It

... quarrels at self-breath. Inagin'd worth
 Holds in his blood such swell'n and hot discourse
 That 'twixt his mental and his active parts
 Kingdom'd Achilles in commotion rages,
 And batters down himself.

II. iii. 167 - 169

"Kingdomed" not in the opulence of inner resources but in the stagnant complacency of an inflated ego. In the light of this one wonders whether Achilles's desire to see the great Hector unarmed is a quest for essence or merely an extension of unnatural desire.

Achilles's conception of his true self, his critical perception of the fallacy of social behaviour, curdles in contact with the world of

the battlefield. Demoralization stains his refuge. He desecrates his vow to Polyxena and emerges from his shell to vindicate his ego and avenge his friend. There is no patriotic inspiration.⁹ He adopts policy and expediency but debases them to a level unimaginable even to Ulysses. Treacherously, unheroically, he butchers Hector.

The terrible incongruity of Achilles's poetic times pronounced after Hector's death emphasizes the relentlessness of a time that is out of joint. It engulfs all as inevitably as the rays of a grimly setting sun :

Even with the vail and dark 'ning of the sun,
To close the day up, Hector's life is done.

II. viii. 7 - 8

The dragon wing of night o'erspreads the earth
And, stickler-like, the armies separates.

V. viii. 17 - 18

This is the expression of a mind capable of fusing mundane reality to cosmic reality, a mind that is gifted with metaphor. It also darkens the tragedy of Achilles who in spite of his estrangement from a trivial war cannot escape being involved in it in the most abject fashion. When Achilles decides to become dynamic he adopts the worldly mode of action forgetting that true equilibrium lies in being through doing. He ceases to be Achilles, weakens his identity by succumbing to the opportunistic code : "Take the instant way."

Although Troilus succumbs to the prevailing coarseness, the world applauds him when, awakened from lotos-eating 'amour', he resolves to avenge Hector. He is even equated with Hector and identified with Troy (IV, v, 105-07 ; V, iii, 60-62). Yet neither Hector nor Troilus has ever had a creative vision of a better Troy. It is only the Troy of the here and now that they can think about. This restricted mental horizon, walled about with outmoded codes yet sizzling with insecurity and impermanence, it is this that accounts for the unique flavour of *Troil. & Cress.* So different from the cosmic vision of great tragedy or the never-never-land of romantic comedy and romance !

Yet one may discern glimpses of greatness that show Shakespeare's unfailing faith in humanity. Troilus rises to the occasion;

expressing heroic defiance and character in an adverse moment even as Agamemnon recommended earlier (I, iii ; 17-21).

‘Hector’s dead.’

There is a word will Priam turn to stone,
Make wells and Niobes of the maids and wives,
Cold statues of the youth ; and, in a word,
Scare Troy out of itself.

V. x. 17 - 21

This conception of grief rendered through images of stagnation and movement alternating with each other indicates the commotion and rhythm of Troilus’s mind at the moment. The inner self is totally integrated with the outer condition : a rare occurrence. The cold monosyllables of “Hector is dead ; there is no more to say” remind one of many other such Shakespearean moments. Intense grief is matched by extreme reticence. Troilus has attained momentary dignity, an extension of identity as a heroic figure. This is reflected in his well-poised speech, so different from the cheap rhetoric of his earlier exhortation to Hector in V, iii, 45-48 :

Let’s leave the hermit pity with our mother ;
And when we have our armours buckled on,
The venom’d vengeance ride upon our swords,
Spur them to ruthless work, rein them from ruth.

After Hector’s death Troilus seems to have found a spiritual equilibrium⁹. ‘Readiness is all,’ as Hamlet would say. Equipose however proves transitory as Troilus soon stoops to common vindictiveness and vows vengeance on Achilles that “great sized coward”. Once again the growth of self-realization is stalled by adjustment with the prevailing note of crude ferocity and pettiness.

The last stretch of the play comprises a succession of short scenes. In this conventional stage practice of Shakespeare’s days we get a visual approximation of flux ; inane and negative action, with heroes humbled in stature by an abject compromise with the minute. Negative sentiments like anger and hatred bind identity to a narrow region of personal requisite, more limited than the code of chivalric honour. Hector raves and rushes about for a “hide,” Achilles for a degenerate friendship while Troilus cries

hoarse for a sleeve, a horse and then for Achilles's blood. It all signifies a demoted cause in an almost causeless war. "A war for a placket," begun by lust, inflamed and supported by honour personal and national, continued in treachery and the self-immolation of great heroes. This last, as we have found, is due to an inescapable external situation and an inner imbalance in emotion and intellect, both acting upon each other.

So ends Shakespeare's version of the story of Troilus and Cressida and Hector. It is an aspect of a perennial problem, that of preserving one's identity in a society that makes so many inroads into one's identity as an individual. The self can no longer be treated as an end-product of long established values but must be conceived as a process in the shifting chiaroscuro of existence. The still centre of self-identity is glimpsed only momentarily as it manages to surface from time to time from the whirlpool of flux. Identity is tossed about "twixt the dangerous shores" of stagnant norms and whirling change.

Troil. & Cress. makes one fearfully contemplate the dangers of secular living when man creates ideals he cannot live up to and is caught in his own web. We find scientific determinism prevalent in a sophisticated society. The massive waste of human potentiality evokes a tragic vision which however is expressed with such detachment that the affective quality of great tragedy seems to have been purposely avoided, while Thersites unsentimentalizes the pity of it. At least in him there is no illusion or mental confusion: "I am a rascal; a scurvy railing knave; a very filthy rogue (V, iv, 27-28). In him however, there is neither humanity nor self-respect. So to save himself from Margarelon's wrath he readily proclaims himself a bastard.

Surprisingly, here in Shakespeare's 'play unpleasant' we find a state of mind paralleling that which is the peculiar product of the two world wars and is the intellectual heritage of the modern generation. The "extant moment" invites a momentary response and "What's past and what's to come is strewed with husks/And formless ruins of oblivion (IV, v, 166-67). In the play, as in modern living, "there is no appeal outside the existential context of human action to an absolute norm." Yet behind it all there is the tacit

acknowledgement that even "new-born gawds" "are made and moulded of things past" (III, iii, 176-77). Shakespeare's profound perception of man as a historical-social phenomenon is structurally and aesthetically brought home to us by the feeling of inconclusiveness left at the end of this drama.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Subsequently abbreviated as *Troil. & Cress.*
2. Although the device of the lottery is found both in Chapman's Homer (Bk. VII) and Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (XIII), the idea of making Ulysses manipulate the lottery and use of the challenge to arouse Achilles is Shakespeare's own. Hence Shakespeare's Ulysses is more an opportunist than an idealist. (See Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays*, vol. I, Methuen, London, 1957, p. 86).
3. All quotations are from Peter Alexander, ed. *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Arabic numerals indicate lines.
4. Beryl Rowland, 'A Cake-Making Image in *Troilus & Cressida*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 21, 1970, pp. 191-94.
5. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, The Bodley Head, 1970, pp. 33-34 ; 44.
6. R. B. Heilman on Sartre's *The Reprieve*, *The Hudson Review*, vol. I, 1948, pp. 112-17.
7. Though the friendship of Achilles and Patroclus is found in Homer, Shakespeare gives it a homosexual slant.
8. In *The Historye Sege & Dystruccyon of Troye* by John Lydgate (1513) Achilles is roused to fight when he sees the Greeks facing defeat and is reproached for doing nothing. (See G. Bullough, *Narrative & Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, vol. VI, pp. 182-83.). In *Troil. & Cress.* Shakespeare deliberately belittles the heroic cause.
9. In one production the play is made to end here with Troilus alone entering Troy on his return from the field, sword in air as a gesture of resolve.
10. Terence Eagleton, *Shakespeare & Society*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1967, p. 26.

PASSION AND POISE : A CRITICAL NOTE ON THE TRAGEDY OF DIDO

SURABHI BANERJEE

THE Book of Dido may indeed be the tragic paean of Virgil's *Aeneid* but Dido ostensibly fails to be a 'tragic heroine'. The fourth book of the epic is apparently the veritable tragedy of Dido, for on the level of plot, Dido's catastrophe amply resembles a tragic disaster and even its very tone and construction are very close to those in a Greek tragedy — yet Dido remains, till the penultimate moment of her self-imposed end, the Virgilian paradigm of a 'wounded woman' — passion and furore all compact.

The tragedy of Dido must be read in conjunction with as well as a necessary sequel to the opening book of the epic. Critics are intrigued by the headlong degeneration of the majestic and heroic queen as she initially appears in the first book as the love-sick hysterical woman who figures as the 'tragic heroine' of the fourth book. Dido is introduced in the first book when the Trojans, driven off their course to Italy, were hospitably received by the queen of Carthage. We come to know that she had led a large team from Tyre to the waste shores of Africa where she is building a splendid city. The welcome which she offers to Aeneas and his Trojans is as warm as it is sincere ; she even invites the Trojans to stay in Carthage and promises to make no discrimination against them :

"Count as your own this city which I am erecting. Beach your ships.
There will be no question of making a distinction between Trojans
and Tyrians." (p. 45)¹

She recalls the ancient ties between her own house and that of Aeneas and says that her own sufferings have taught her to help the distressed :

"My own acquaintance with misfortune has been teaching me to help
others who are in distress." (p. 47)

Dido's regal grandeur displays itself in her bounteous feasts and her munificent gifts, in her observance of gorgeous ceremonies and

rites for the gods, in her court teeming with its attendants and minstrels and above all, in the benign mercy which she lavishes on the boy Ascanius. Virgil deliberately highlights the queen's magnanimity of heart, the greatness of her character and thus, she appeals to deep-seated Roman feelings such as their reverence for power and hospitality. Here she appears as a laudable woman with high dignity and noble instincts — a 'great' heroine.

Besides, in the first book, Virgil has surrounded Dido with the images of Penthesilea and Diana, virgin-warrior and virgin-huntress. Her paradigm is the woman who rejects the role of a mother and wife but is man's equal on the battlefield and Dido has succeeded in transferring this equality to the field of governing a city :

She was like Diana when she keeps her dancers dancing on the banks of Eurotas or along the slopes of Cynthers she is taller than all other goddesses, as with her quiver slung from her shoulder she steps on her way..... Like her was Dido, and like her she walked happily with the throng around her, intent on hastening the work for her future realm..... she was already announcing new laws and statutes to her people and deciding by her own balanced judgement, or by lot, a fair division of the toil demanded of them (p. 43).

Dido, thus, is an example of what a woman can achieve and attain if her character is dowered with the attributes of a heroic man. She does not come from Homer and has no root in heroic story ; Virgil has given her a heroic dimension in his own manner, for at the same time Virgil underlines the vulnerability of such heroism, the fragile balance shortly giving way to self-consuming passion :

..... and he (Cupid) assailed that heart of hers so long inactive, and her brain, so unused to these thoughts, with the thrill of a living love.

(p. 49)

The forebodings of the tragic doom are spelt out in explicit terms ; the unhappy Phoenician Dido, Virgil observes, is 'condemned (now) to sure destruction', she is 'condemned' and 'doomed' and 'will never be at peace' — thus, the apparent tragedy of Dido is already foreshadowed at the end of the first book.

In the fourth book, Dido is seen as 'poised frightened between fitful sleep and waking', ablaze with 'old fire coming again'. Anna, her sister has convinced her that she should not resist her passion :

"Anna set Dido's heart, already kindled, ablaze with a new access of love, gave new hope to tempt her wavering intention and broke down her scruples" and the two set out to elicit divine approval. Once her exorbitant passion for Aeneas dominates her nature and engages her vanity, she forgets about Carthage and neglects her noble mission, the great task which she has begun :

Meanwhile the partly built towers had ceased to rise. No more did young soldiers practise arms. The construction of harbours and impregnable battlements came to a stop, work hung suspended on gigantic, menacing walls, and the sky-high cranes were still. (p. 99)

The human drama is further precipitated by the divine machinations of Juno and Venus and the union of Dido and Aeneas in a cave strikes a premonitory note. The powers of Earth and sky carry out in their own way the ceremony of an ancient marriage. This perversion of a traditional Roman wedding ceremony, with lightning bolts for marriage torches, Juno as the matron-of-honour and the nymphs raising the nuptial cry, graphically foreshadows the results of the marriage. As Virgil writes : "On that day were sown the seeds of suffering and death" (p. 102). The marriage was barren ; in fact Aeneas denies that they were ever bound by wedlock. Further, it caused Dido's death and the death of her city because before she killed herself, Dido called down a curse of eternal hostility upon their two nations.

From the very moment Aeneas strives to escape the 'snares of shameful passion', Dido becomes the living picture of emotional as well as moral disintegration. She appears, in the rest of the book, as the irrational and impetuous queen, full of violent resentment. Like Turnus, she, too, illustrates the limitations and the perils of the heroic stance. Her high spirit makes her act in defiance of her nature and brings her own doom.

The transition from a conscience-stricken ideal heroine to a love-sick woman has perplexed critics who have assigned the role of a 'tragic heroine' to Dido. But as a matter of fact, Dido has been primarily conceived as 'an infatuated woman' and 'infatuation' can hardly be an attribute of the Virgilian concept of heroism. In the fourth book Virgil actually describes her as 'the infatuated queen' (p. 106) ; or, 'There lay no help for her infatuation in

temples or in prayers' (p. 99); 'it is the frenzy and fury of an infatuated woman'; she is, according to the poet, 'an infatuated woman who cannot bear the agony of her suffering with grace and dignity (p. 106). Her character, Virgil reiterates, lacks the depth and poise necessary to absorb the anguish :

Furious, and quite unable to face the truth, she ran in excited riot about Carthage, like a Bacchanal uplifted to frenzy as the emblems of Bacchus are shaken and the cry of his name is heard... (p. 106).

and naturally the idea of a violent and ostentatious death and a spectacular ritual of the end, obsesses her and she becomes an obvious victim of the 'excesses' of her character than of the inexorable circumstances, or of inscrutable destiny. Shorn of heroic virtues, of restraint and of grace, she falls far short of being a 'tragic queen'.

She lives in the last resort for herself, for her own emotions and passions and pride. As she comes to know that she has been forsaken by Aeneas, she becomes all the more cabined in her own self, thinking only of herself and of her maimed pride. And if her beloved will not stay with her, let him perish in a hideous death and let the world of their descendants be convulsed in war. Thus, Dido's heroic nature, despite all its great qualities, lives for itself.

Notably enough, Virgil has represented Dido, just after she has fallen in love with Aeneas as 'a wounded animal with the part of a weapon still lodged in its body'. Dido gnawed by love's invisible fire — had long suffered from the deep wound "draining her life-blood" (p. 97); for all the time "the flame ate into her melting marrow, and deep in her heart the wound was silently alive" ... (p. 99) or again, "like a doe caught off her guard and pierced by an arrow from some armed shepherd" (p. 99) "an utterly entrapped being" (p. 107). Dido never recovered from her metaphorical wound, but grows more and more frenzied and rabid throughout the book until she actualizes the simile by falling on Aeneas's sword. As she dies 'there is a hiss from the wound still lodged deep under her breast (p. 118); Anna laments her death: 'Come, let me see your wounds — I must wash them clean with water ... Dido attempted to raise her heavy eyes again, but failed; and the deep wound in her breast, where the sword stood planted, breathed loud' (p. 118). A great but pitiable lover who is refused a heroic

stature. The fugitive moments of ubiquitous sorrow and Anna's heart-rending lamentation after Dido's death, fail to evoke the necessary sense of waste :

A cry rose to the palace-roof. Carthage was stricken by the shock and Rumour ran riot in the town, Lamentation and sobbing and women's wailing rang through the houses, and high heaven echoed with the loud mourning... (p. 117).

Thus, an extremely feeble sense of waste is thoroughly engulfed by the dominant sense of pity — even 'Juno', Virgil writes, 'who has all power *took pity* on the long anguish of her difficult death' (p. 118).

But why does Dido suffer this 'difficult death'? The more popular critical view is that the tragic error of Dido lies in her violation of her Oath to her dead husband not to remarry. Her tragic fault is that she had taken a vow to remain loyal to the spirit of Sychaeos but she breaks it as she unites herself to Aeneas. This is the fault which eventually proves her undoing.

I think the more sensible approach would be to explore how far her death is caused by the tragic inexorability of inevitable circumstances and how far by the excesses in Dido's character which are deliberately foregrounded by Virgil. The excesses are not redeemed even at the end. Even her last speech fails to restore the dignity to the 'tragic queen'; however serene and solemn her final words may sound immediately after her frenzied outbursts, even on the brink of her last moment she reiterates the curse against Aeneas and presages the perdition of her betrayer :

"I shall die, and die unaveaged; but die I shall. Yes, yes; this is the way I like to go into the dark. And may the heartless Trojan, far out on the deep, drink in the sight of my fire and take with him the evil omen of my death" (p. 117).

Dido, with her symbolic as against her human aspects, stands for the unrestrained sensibility condemned by the Stoics and the implacable spirit of historical Carthage. And these qualities — the lack of restraint, impetuosity and overriding passion — are just those which Aeneas must shun if he is to fulfil his patriotic mission. And of course, if we consider the entire scheme of the epic, Dido must be deemed as an instrument of Juno and part of the evil force impeding the epic's thrust toward order and civilization. She

combines the functions of the Homeric Calypso whose love detained him and in some ways she resembles Medea in Apollonius Rhodius, Book III. Unlike Odysseus Aeneas has no Penelope and the delaying roles played by the other women of the Odyssey—Circe, Calypso, Nausicaa, Arete—are all compressed into the role of Dido.

The paradox of passion and poise underlying the Virgilian conception of Dido as a tragic heroine, is finally resolved in the concluding lines of the fourth book. Virgil sums up the end in these terms :

For since she perished neither by destiny nor by a death deserved, but tragically, before her day, in the mad heat of a sudden passion...

(p. 118).

This line not only provides a significant key to the riddle of seemingly irreconcilable facets of Dido's character as conceived by Virgil and an answer to the common critical queries as to the cause of Dido's tragedy but also underlines the unequivocal Virgilian stance. At the same time it indicates that there is no lacuna in his development of Dido's character, as it is commonly alleged by most Virgilian critics. It is obvious from this statement summing up Dido's tragedy, as well as from the words and images used by the poet throughout the fourth book, that Virgil never intended to assign her a truly heroic status.

Reference

1. This and all the following references to the text are from the Penguin prose translation of the epic, Virgil's *The Aeneid* by W. F. Jackson Knight Penguin Books, 1956.

THE METAPHOR OF READING
IN ITALO CALVINO'S NOVEL *IF ON A WINTER'S
NIGHT A TRAVELLER*

ABDER - RAHIM ABU - SWAILEM

THIS paper investigates the metaphor of reading in Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night* and shows the relationship between author and reader, author and text and, reader and text. It focuses on the reading process and the reader's perception and actualisation of the text. It shows that the reading process is central to our understanding of Calvino's novel which requires an active and alert reader who is willing to participate with the author and the text in the shared experience of the novel. In addition, It will examine the novel in the light of reception theory particularly as expressed by Wolfgang Iser and also by Roland Barthes.

The implicit relationship between author and reader other than with a writer of a diary in minute cipher, is both inherent and conscious. It can be ignored totally, acknowledged sporadically as when in *Jane Eyre* the narrator addresses the "Dear Reader" or in *Tristram Shandy* the narrator requests the reader's help in physically maneuvering a character, or treated as central as in *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, the subject of this paper.

All literature rests upon the text existing as a shared experience between Author and Reader, only which can make sense to the reader who cannot otherwise understand the implications of the event or language. Within the shared vision, however, the creative unique vision of the author is made available to the reader through his understanding of what is shared and the text's production of a recognizable, but ultimately individual, actualization.

If on a Winter's Night, however, differs in that in reality, there is no shared Text because the text does not exist for the author at all. Calvino's contribution to *If on a Winter's Night* is suggestive rather than actual. Given his echo of Barthes's analysis of the

reading process, the double meaning of the suggestive seems appropriate. In its lack of any genuine Text, *If on a Winter's Night* is unique rather than just an example of shifted emphasis. The dialogue between author and reader exists not to further the novel but as the novel.

It seems that Calvino owes much of his presentation of his novel to reception Theory, particularly as its very structure is built upon the relations inherent in the reading process; those between the reader and the text, the reader and the author, and ultimately, the reader and the other reader.

Reception Theory is a development in modern literary criticism which focuses on the reader and emphasizes the importance of the function of the receiver of the text which was initiated by the author. The reading process, according to the theory, takes place within a shifting, changing frame of reference generated by the text. Literary texts are processes of signification materialized only in the practice of reading. For literature to happen, the reader is as vital as the author. Here, the reader is engaged in constructing hypotheses about the meaning of the text. He makes implicit connections, fills in gaps and draws inferences. To do this means drawing on a tacit knowledge of the world in general and of literary conventions in particular. Furthermore, texts are full of gaps, blanks, ambiguities, indeterminacies, which the reader must fill, close up or develop.¹

Reception theory ultimately is concerned with the process of reading whereby the reader, through making inferences and drawing conclusions, actualizes the text. Within reception theory, however, there are different approaches to the process. In particular, I intend to mention the approaches of Wolfgang Iser and Roland Barthes as *If on a Winter's Night* illuminates both these approaches and becomes more accessible when viewed from the points on which these theorists differ. According to Wolfgang Iser, the reader seeks to organize the work into a consistent whole. He does so through sharing with the author an understanding of and familiarity with not only the complexity of the language in which the work is written, but also the literary techniques and conventions which it contains. Iser sees a discrepancy between the reader's awareness

of these shared codes and the literary work as a valuable discrepancy as it forces the reader to question his perceptions and beliefs. A two-way process occurs: the reader modifies the text through his own perceptions of it and is modified by the text. This process requires not only shared beliefs and codes but also, in the reader, the flexibility and open-mindedness to question these beliefs and allow them, and himself, to be transformed.²

For Calvino, the text is a shared experience between the author and the reader, references, clues, language and a mental familiarity and communal literary past are required in common in order that *If on a Winter's Night* exists at all, albeit idiosyncratically, within the reader's mind. Calvino draws upon the collective consciousness of the ideal reader, the shared literary, visual, aural and subconscious continuations of the suggestive opening outlines of the novel. It is a collective consciousness, however, of a highly educated and literary nature: rather than being collective of the masses it is collective of the elite, hence the self-consciousness and exclusiveness of the novel.

Calvino invites his reader to leave behind the familiar world so that he can truly participate in the adventure the text offers him:

Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade..... because once you're absorbed in reading there will be no budging you.³

The purpose behind the reading adventure which so absorbs Calvino's reader is to form a whole of the text according to Iser, "... to form the consistency that the reader will always be in search of."⁴

Does, however, *If on a Winter's Night* form a consistent whole? On a first analysis, structured as it is around the beginning of ten separate novels, it seems that the consistency of the whole lies in the function of the reader. The reader in this novel is central to the narrative and the act of reading becomes central to the life of the "main character", the reader.

In the opening lines of the novel Calvino addresses the reader:

You are about to read Italo Calvino's new novel *If on A Winter's Night A Traveller*. Relax, Concentrate, Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade.⁵

Later in the novel, the central character, "you", is presented as engaged in a pleasurable activity which precludes and prompts all others. The "plot" of the novel is that of the effort of the reader to find a consistent, coherent version of Calvino's novel. In one of his frequent conversations with the reader, Calvino, as writer, says of the intensity of the writing process :

Every novel I begin writing is exhausted shortly after the beginning, as if I had already said everything I have to say. I have had the idea of writing a novel composed only of beginnings of novels.⁶

The reader, unable to find "Calvino's novel", travels through different novels (their beginnings only) which are presented tangibly as if he physically passes through them by the reading process : "... steam from a piston covers the opening of the chapter, a cloud of smoke hides part of the first paragraph".⁷

Through these potentially pure beginnings which have no continuation (Calvino's praise of the first chapter of a work is one which is expressed in terms of purity) we follow the reader through the myriad forms of the modern novel. But throughout his travels through these forms and through the concerns of modern fiction, violence, sex, political settings which continuously create the black atmosphere, the reader who is the central protagonist, who, quickly as the "I" as well as the "you" of the novel, transverses a plot of romantic simplicity. *If on a Winter's Night* resolves itself into the romantic tale of boy uniting with girl, one which significantly ends before the consummation takes place. Ultimately Calvino's work reiterates itself :

The romantic fascination produced in the pure state by the first sentences of the first chapter of many novels is soon lost in the continuation of the story.⁸

The purity of the first lines makes up the opening of the novel with which *If on a Winter's Night* ends, reflected in its poetic language and images the timeless, circular, enclosed and encapsulated world of *The Arabian Nights*.

If on a Winter's Night a Traveller, outside the town of Malbork, leaning from the steep slope without fear of wind or vertigo, looks down in the gathering shadow in a network of lines that enlaze, in a network of lines that intersect #, on the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon around an empty grave—What story down there awaits its end ?—he asks, anxious to hear the story.⁹

The stories could end only in two ways ; having passed all the tests, the hero and the heroine married, or else they died.¹⁰ Despite the disjointed, alienated and essentially modern content of the subplots which make up the components of this extended first sentence, the plot of *If on a Winter's Night* becomes a classical case of "a boy meets a girl".

This essentially inward-looking, self-referring aspect of the work does not, however, exclude the constant references to Reception Theory throughout. For this reason character, plot and setting are repeated and universalized : Characters from the different novels bear the same names as characters from the previous ones, just as situation and setting become indefinable and inter-changeable. "The lives of individual of the human race form a constant plot."¹¹ What Calvino is focusing on is the act of reading :

"The text, when you are the reader, is something that is there, against which you are forced to clash."¹² "You have entered the novel...."¹³

Reading is going towards something that is about to be, and "no one knows yet what it will be."¹⁴

What kind of reader does this novel ask for ? It is obvious from the adventures of the "Reader" that the reader first of all, should be willing to enter the game and participate in it. Also, Calvino is looking for a reader who is always alert, conscious of the tricks and sub-meanings intended by writers, thus, one who is able to play the game on the same terms as the writer. In order to obtain these qualities he should regard the reading process as a holy act or a ritual and should be aware that it is a demanding activity. In an episode which parodies the original tale of *One Thousand and One Nights*, the wife of the Sultan orders the conspirators around her who were awaiting a sign from her, "never to disturb her while she is reading, not even if the palace were about to blow up."¹⁵

Like Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, Calvino interprets the nature of reading pleasure in sexual terms and introduces a female reader and their relation leads to intercourse. At the end of the novel he marries her. Barthes, however, does not see the central function of reading as the making of a coherent

whole which is done by Calvino : for Barthes the paradox of writing and reading resolves itself in the orgiastic, orgasmic moment of bliss, or "ecstasy", as Culler translates it. Distinct from the normal pleasure of the text, Barthes seems to be resolving these paradoxes with a concept of creative union between the author/text/reader which he likens to sexual union. Barthes is aware of the contradiction between appreciation of works of past culture and modernity and the relation between them. "... in Flaubert it is the blossoming apple trees of Normandy which I read according to Proust."¹⁶ He can imagine an aesthetics based on the pleasure of the consumer :

We can imagine a typology of the pleasures of reading or of the readers of pleasure...linking the reading neurosis to the hallucinated of the text. The fetishist would be matched with the divided-up text, the singling out of quotations, formulae, turns of phrase..... The obsessive would experience the voluptuous release of the letter... the hysteric throws himself across the text¹⁷

Much of Barthes's language appears in *If on a Winter's Night* ; the paradoxes of reality in unreality, truth in falsehood, liberation in bondage and mystification in clarity and all other opposite faces which Calvino presents to us are shown within the sensual language of the novel. The opposite of academic reading in which the reader becomes a computer or else relates everything to the "Trends of Contemporary Thought and Problems that Demand a Solution"¹⁸ becomes, in its ultimate form, the non-reader. The non-reader reads nothing in order to liberate himself from the imposed culture-laden overtones of the printed word. Interestingly enough, because the text is an object of pleasure, even the non-reader plays with the text and finds pleasure in doing so. The non-reader says, "I make things with books. I make objects. Yes, artworks."¹⁹ The non-reader is someone who has learned not to read, a learning process akin, I suspect, to learning to read creatively in Barthes's sense of reading Bliss. It is the traditional text which engenders pleasure : the orgasmic Bliss which Barthes likens to a "preconscious ... extreme of perversion [is] ... empty, mobile, unpredictable extreme".²⁰ These qualities of unpredictability, mobility and also emptiness, are those which Calvino experiments with in *If on a Winter's Night* and I think, ultimately, that it is his experimentation with them that gives the novel its great value.

This novel is essentially post-modernist. As such it has no correct realization : as exemplified by the conglomerate opening sentence, the limitations put upon the reader by the possibility of pure text, are nonexistent. Not enough is given within the novel for the reader to be constrained by anything definite and definable. As Calvino says :

the things that the novel does not say are necessarily more numerous than those it does say and only a special halo around what is written can give the illusion that you are reading also what is unwritten.²¹

It is only in the shifting inter-relation between the multiplied aspects of the repeated, changing character and plot that the nuances are built up : the novel remains indefinable except in its most simple narrative of boy-meets-girl/reader meets text, writer, and other reader. About the female reader Calvino makes a character say :

.. reading means stripping herself of every purpose, every foregone conclusion, to be ready to catch a voice that makes itself heard when you least expect it...²²

There is no definite or distinct meaning within the sub-plots and sections of the work for a definite, definitive reading to be possible. As such the fragmented world which it presents can only be encompassed within the sexual union of readerly ecstasy as Barthes defines it. It is interesting that visually the novel is cinematic, the sub-plots reminiscent of Film-Noir, rather than painterly or theatrical.

Reception Theory ignores the relation between language and the reader and the social, historical context which has produced them both. Calvino discusses social and historical content within *If on a Winter's Night* when he examines in Chapter Three the novel which does not or, may be, never did exist. He labels such considerations as "dead", breaking away from conventional, classical, social and historic content, revolution, psychological obsession, alienation and quest for identity.

Several questions about *If on a Winter's Night* remain to be asked. What, if anything, are we to know from the text ? Is there any text at all ? Given the structure of this novel, these questions are important in relating it to Reception Theory. Iser's articulation

of the theory is, does Calvino believe in a coherent whole and is one presented in this novel? Does he present us, ultimately, with an informed reader? The reader / protagonist at the end of the novel realizes with a "flash" that he wishes to marry, to unite in bliss, with the other reader. Rather than a journey of self-knowledge, as Iser would present it, the reader's progress through *If on a Winter's Night* has been a journey to sexual union, to a mystical realization of union, as Barthes describes it indescribable and elusive.

In answer to the first question, of the sub-plots remains partials and contributes only nuance and possibility to the text. Written in the manner of various modern authors, the sub-plots do not add to a whole as distinct from the narrative about the reader and that in which he engages in the act of reading. As opening and possibilities only, Calvino is deliberately rejecting the idea of the whole. It is easy to conceive of a novel in which he focused on the reader and his role in which Calvino included a coherent, complete sub-plot: the final, complete effect is deliberately made up of the shifting, the elusive, the intangible much as Barthes places in these the origin of eroticism.

"Is there any text at all?" In its multiplicity and incompleteness lies a multiplicity of a potentially complete text with an abundance of references and anticipated repercussions, like circles spreading out from a stone thrown into a pool of water. Because of this, the text is dense with pre-knowings, and with culturally overlaid remains from previous fictional feasts. Much of its charm lies in the instantaneousness quickness with which it presents the images of the modern fictional scene. The puns and the light, humorous touch are part of a shared joke, and, also, a shared pleasure of reminiscences of past pleasure. The reader who emerges both within the novel and from having read it is one to a degree composed of past readings. Calvino both re-creates instantly and utilizes these past readings in the creation of his own novel, one which is created by the reader individually in his own memories of the "flashcards" which Calvino holds before him.

One problem remains: that of audience. Calvino, like Barthes, seems dismissive of the academic audience and the traditional literary critical modes formulated by the academic world. Indeed,

Barthes wishes to explode and question all pre-intellectualized reading so that the organic intensity of Bliss can take place. Of language, Barthes says :

How can a text, which consists of language, be outside language ?
How exteriorize the world's jargon without taking refuge in an ultimate jargon where in the others would simply be reported, recited ?²³

Calvino expresses this desire to get outside the constraints of language :

I, too, would like to erase myself and find for each book another I, another voice, another name, to [be] reborn ; but my aim is to capture in the book the illegible world, without centre, without ego, without I... I do not believe totality can be contained in language ; my problem is what remains outside, the unwritten, the unwritable.²⁴

Calvino presents an amusing account of the academic approach to reading both in his portrayal of the University Professor of Chapter Three, and of Lotaria, the antitheses of the heroine. Lotaria believes that reading can be broken down into an act that can be performed by a computer : that it can be innumeraled systematized, dealt with mathematically. It is from this approach that the non-reader requires liberation. Paradoxically, appropriate in a novel full of paradoxes, it seems that an academic audience is the only one envisionable for Calvino's work. Requiring such a great amount of past reading in order to furnish the gaps in the narrative, the audience for *If on a Winter's Night* is limited to the highly informed reader, if not the actual academic. Without the myriad, instantaneous continuations for the possible openings, without the density of imagination linked and enlivened by the recall which the text stimulates, the absence of coherence would prevent the work from being a novel at all.

Calvino's likening of the critical blurbs on the back of the jacket, "generic phrases that don't say a great deal," to preliminaries to the "more substantial pleasure of the consummation of the act (of) reading the book" incline me to question if the novel itself measures up to the expectation engendered. Is it "endlessly which the Reader accepts and acknowledges and which spark off or initiate a mental text" ? The text of *If on a Winter's Night* does not

exist concretely but only within the minds of its readers. In that its uniqueness lies.

As an exposition of Reception Theory Calvino's novel, like some others, changes the emphasis of traditional literature : instead of actualizing a story about internal or external development of character and plot, he actualizes a story about the actualization of literature : the plot doesn't exist except within the reader's mind ; the characters, despite their repetitive reflection of each other don't exist either ; the real character about whom this book is written is the Reader.

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THE CONCEPT OF THE GOTHIC AND THE NATURE OF THE GOTHIC ROMANCE

SUJATA BHATTACHARYYA

IF we agree with Marilyn Butler's introduction to *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background* (1760-1830; see note 30), where she describes the protean aspects of romanticism, we may conclude that an aspect of this impassioned protest against neoclassical constraint in various forms and styles was the Gothic romance.

Discussing the Gothic romance necessarily calls for an explanation of the term Gothic. Explained literally, Gothic seems to imply anything connected with the Goths who flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries, after Christ. But as Ruskin, a noted critic of Gothic art, made clear, Gothic architecture did not imply that the nations which patronized it were:

Literally of Gothic lineage, far less that their architecture had been originally invented by the Goths themselves; but it did imply that they and their buildings together exhibited a degree of sternness and rudeness, which, in contradistinction to the character of Southern and Eastern nations, appeared like a perpetual reflection of the contrast between the Goth and the Roman in their first encounter.¹

This marked contrast with the Romanesque style became the criterion for judging the Gothic style. Ruskin goes on to say, 'when ...Roman,...became the model for the imitation of civilized Europe, at the close of the so-called Dark ages, the word Gothic became a term of unmitigated contempt, not unmingled with aversion ...'.²

Contempt and aversion for the Gothic was only too evident in what we term as the neoclassical age of English literature. John Evelyn, very vocal about the absence of beauty in the Gothic form, pointed out that Gothic architecture created nothing but 'melancholy monkish piles' which were without any just proportion or beauty. Evelyn was not alone. To all but a few of his

contemporaries the term Gothic conveyed nothing other than the suggestion of barbarians and savage force. Gothic architecture was taken to be the product of a barbarous race ignorant of classical truth to nature³ An age used to the symmetry and the severity of the classical style could not bring itself to appreciate a style created out of confusion and inconsistency. So, confusion and inconsistency — these then were the hallmark of the Gothic style of architecture as understood by the eighteenth century and also its predecessors,⁴ with its artistic totality disturbed by the introduction of things like diagonal ribs.⁵ Thus, people were faced with a revolution in the field of architecture. The Gothic architect revealed a taste, not for simplicity and proportion, but for the ornate and the convoluted. To the Age of Reason this indicated a trend towards the non-rational, the sensational.

In his chapter on 'Classic' and 'Romantic' in *The Romantic Agony*, Mario Praz lists three distinct 'romantic' periods in the history of European Literature — 'the first comes to light in the tragedies of Euripides and the dialogues of Plato, ... the second coincides with the blossoming of profane romances in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries ... the third is the one which generally bears the name of the Romantic Movement, the characteristic(s) of which (are) ... reaction against clarity and rationalism.'⁶ It is very natural to think that Romantic poetry is what Praz is talking of in this context. But it would be too simplistic a view to define an entire movement only in terms of Wordsworth or Coleridge or Shelley or Keats, with references now and then to Byron or even to Blake. The intense urge to break through the barriers of convention and set the creative spirit free, pervaded nearly the whole of the latter half of the eighteenth century and had made itself felt long before, though fully flourished around, 1798 A.D., the year which is sometimes said to usher in the Romantic Movement. In its search for a means of escape from rationalism, the Romantic mind, very naturally, turned to Gothic Architecture with its scanty respect for exactitude and clarity of design. Gradually, the Romantic mind came to associate certain positive values with the Gothic because it was only in Gothic art that it could see art free itself from being merely mimetic. The Gothic artist, by his ability to create an artistic whole out of parts incomplete in

themselves and dependent on each other, inspired him with an idea which was later to be made famous by Romantic art — the idea of organic unity or constitutive unity as opposed to the idea of collective unity.

The catholicity of taste of the Gothic artist made every idea, however fantastic, grist to his mill. He could weld even apparently absurd and irrelevant details together to form a pattern which seemed to be an organic whole. After the neoclassic rigidity regarding form, the Romantic mind appreciated this elasticity of the Gothic mode. The cluttering of details together gave the impression of a form trying to break out of an imposed framework, an impression directly opposed to a sense of repose, a sense of being well contained within a single framework achieved by the classical artist. So the Gothic artist, successfully, through his art, cultivated the idea of restless energy, of an untamed spirit moving away from a well-ordered universe towards a world unknown and mysterious. The Romantic rebel was irresistibly drawn to this Gothic world by its 'pronounced and stimulating "otherness"' refreshingly different from the "'nature and normality" of the neoclassical tradition'.⁸ The picture that the Romantic created in his mind of this 'other' world, became essentially a world of the supernatural, drawing upon "'Gothic" mythology and legends, superstition and regional folklore and even the illusions that belong to the subjective world,—"beckoning shapes", "airy voices", lurid apparitions, ghosts and goblins haunting the ruins and graveyards.'⁹

With the revival of interest in medievalism through architecture, the eagerness to delve into the mysteries of a time past was further facilitated by the 'development in the mid-eighteenth century of the theory of the sublime'.¹⁰ Explaining the Longinian stand, Punter says, 'in place of "precision", Longinus advocated a literature of sublimity, by which he means ... a literature not of the limited but of the limitless, a kind of writing which "masters" its audience with its grandeur and scope and which resists ... imposed constraints.'¹¹ Contemplation of such a subject-matter could not but create a feeling of wonder, of awe, which led to poetry written by poets better known as 'graveyard poets'.¹²

But this is not all there is to 'Graveyard Poetry'. In pieces such as Dyer's *Grongar Hill* and David Mallet's *Excursion*, the cosmic grandeur of Young's imagery is replaced by disgusting and nauseous descriptions (e.g., in *Grongar Hill*).

Thus, besides melancholy and a yearning for the unattainable, 'Graveyard Poetry' helped to establish a fashionable mood evoking horror and terror in a heightened form. The supernatural was treated in a manner which bordered on the barbaric. This was greatly applauded by the readers of such poems who found in this barbarity elements of beauty.

'Graveyard Poetry', it may be said, laid the foundation stone of Gothic fiction, the genre yet to be created. But this work was left to Horace Walpole and his peer who, fascinated as they were with the romance tradition, a tradition rich with the fantasies of 'giants, dragons, enchanters, magic castles .. enchanted ladies',¹³ saw the connection between the Gothic mood and the romance form as natural and inviolable. Out of the fusion of these forms was born the Gothic fiction—a literature of nightmare. Among its conventions are found dream-landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination. Its fictional world gives form to amorphous fears and impulses common to all mankind, using an amalgam of materials, some torn from the author's own subconscious mind and some the stuff of myth, folklore, fairytale and romance.¹⁴

There is, however, an important question that needs to be answered. Even though universally known as 'Gothic romances' do these fantastic stories really conform to what Ruskin called 'The nature of Gothic'? (Ruskin's treatise on Gothic architecture is widely acclaimed by art-lovers even to day, hence it would not be wrong to judge the Gothic romances by his views.) Or were they merely the exercises of an extravagant imagination, designed for no other purpose than to evoke the emotions of horror and terror? An examination of the three most noted works of this genre, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, and *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Lewis in the light of Ruskin's definition the Gothic spirit, will perhaps enable us to decide on this head.

In the essay, 'The Nature of Gothic', in his memorable work *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin defines Gothic architecture as having 'external forms and internal elements'. The internal elements are nothing but "...certain mental tendencies of the builders, legibly expressed in it; as fancifulness, love of variety, love of richness and such others."¹⁵ He then goes on to enumerate the distinctive qualities of a Gothic Work of art—"I believe then that the characteristic or moral elements of Gothic are the following, placed in the order of their importance.

- (1) Savageness
- (2) Changefulness
- (3) Naturalism
- (4) Grotesqueness
- (5) Rigidity
- (6) Redundance¹⁶

What struck Ruskin as the most important characteristic of Gothic architecture was the air of wild, untamed energy. It is, indeed, the mark that every critic looks for when judging a work of art as 'Gothic'. Ruskin interpreted this savageness as exemplifying 'a profound truth, which the instinct of mankind almost unconsciously recognizes,...'¹⁷ He explains the point further: '...the finer the nature, the more flaws it will show through the clearness of it; ...'¹⁸ Applying this theory to *The Castle of Otranto*, what do we discover? Its 'savageness' is limited to the sight of Conrad's mangled body and Matilda's brutal murder by a human being little more than a beast. Apart from the contrived horror of such situations, where is the scope for any savagery? The story is told in the true romance fashion and all the trappings of the genre are present—chivalrous knight as hero, pure and pious heroines. Coupled with this is an excess of sentimentality. It would not be very wrong here to quote from Stephen Riou's *The Grecian Order of Architecture* (though Riou used these words in a different context): '...falsely delicate, crowded with supernatural ornaments and often very unnatural. The imagination is highly worked up . . . but it is an extravagant imagination.'¹⁹ *The Castle of Otranto* is indeed the work of an extravagant imagination. One cannot help feeling that the supernatural is used merely as a decoration, to embellish a traditional

form to make it seem original. No profound truth is propounded by it, other than the human mind's delight in the unnatural.

Lewis, of course, could claim to have portrayed savageness in all its aspects in *The Monk*. Ambrosio himself seems to be the embodiment of savageness :

He was no sooner alone than he gave free loose to the indulgence of his vanity. When he remembered the enthusiasm which his discourse had excited his heart swelled with rapture, and his imagination presented him with splendid visions of aggrandizement. He looked round him with exultation, and Pride told him loudly, that he was superior to the rest of his fellow-creatures²⁰

leading to savage exercise of power (as when he dealt with Agnes's guilt) :

Shall St. Clare's convent become the retreat of Prostitutes ? Shall I suffer the church of Christ to cherish in its bosom debauchery and shame ? ... Such unity would make me your accomplice Mercy would here be criminal.²¹

This savageness is matched by his savage desire for Antonia :

He was not unconscious, that his attempts were highly criminal : He saw clearly the baseness of seducing the innocent Girl : But his passion was too violent to permit his abandoning his design. He resolved to pursue it, let the consequences be what they might.²²

And his savage desire resulted in savage cruelty :

Ambrosio struggled in vain to disengage himself. Elvira quitted not her hold, but redoubled her cries for succour. The Friar's danger grew more urgent. ...And worked up to madness by the approach of ruin. He adopted a resolution equally desperate and savage. Turning around suddenly, with one hand He grasped Elvira's throat so as to prevent her continuing her clamour, and with the other, dashing her violently upon the ground,..²³

It might be argued that these instances prove the complexities of the Monk — a Macbeth-like character. But the grandeur is lacking. Ruskin says, 'imperfection is in some sort essential to all that we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body ... a state of progress.'²⁴ Progress Ambrosio does make, though not to reveal his fine nature through his faults but, it is suspected, to enable Lewis to heap 'horror ... on horror, and darkness ... upon darkness, midst cold clammy carcasses, accumulated Skeletons, bloodstained daggers & c.'²⁵

Mrs. Radcliffe totally avoids recourse to 'savageness'. All her descriptions aim, not at savageness, but at arousing the effect of awesome majesty. Judged by this point of view, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* hardly lives up to its claim to being a Gothic romance.

About 'changefulness' Ruskin was of the opinion that it offers the scope for invention of forms which are 'capable of perpetual novelty'.²⁶ Love of order does not signify love of art, and 'changefulness' is a virtue that enabled the Gothic artist to create the effect of limitless energy.

The virtue of 'changefulness' provided the author of the Gothic romance with great scope to indulge his fancy without any restraint. In *The Castle of Otranto* it enables Walpole to tell his readers a simple moral tale of virtue triumphing over vice in a manner as labyrinthine as the dungeons of the castle. The same may be said of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* where 'a beautiful and solitary girl is persecuted in picturesque surroundings and, after many fluctuations of fortune, ..., is restored to her friends and marries the man of her choice .. this simple theme is complicated by mystery and involved at some point in terrible, often supernatural suggestions.'²⁷ But only in *The Monk* we find the true Gothic artist at work — for, neither in *The Castle of Otranto* nor in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is the main plot complicated by the introduction of a sub-plot which seems to occupy as important a position as the main plot in the author's scheme of things. The link between the story of Ambrosio's downfall and the Raymond - Agnes story is tenuous at best. Lewis, true to his art, seems to have introduced the sub-plot only to break the monotony of a well-ordered plot. But the most probable explanation is that Lewis, his imagination stirred by the tale of the 'Bleeding Nun', found the Raymond-Agnes episode eminently suitable for allowing the Bleeding Nun to narrate the ghastly story again.

The 'Gothic multiplicity of tales and half-remembered details towards a complex central plot'²⁸ that we find in these three stories illustrate admirably the idea of organic unity. The sub-plots reinforce the moral lesson that the authors wish to teach the readers through the main plots. Agnes's curse on Ambrosio in *The Monk*. '... when you yield to impetuous passions! when

you feel that Man is weak and born to err ; ...Think upon Agnes and despair of pardon ; '80 brings into direct focus the idea of the impending fall and subsequent perdition of the Monk. The loose strands in all the three Gothic romances are gathered together in the end to present 'simple black-and-white fables common to oral literature ...'80 It would also be appropriate to quote Hurd in this context : 'This, it is true, is not the classic unity which consists in the representation of one entire action : but it is a unity of another sort, a unity resulting from the respect which a number of related actions have to one common purpose.'81

While still on the topic of 'changefulness', Ruskin warns that the critic must distinguish between a healthy and a diseased love of change. It is the diseased love of change that is apparent in *The Monk*, where, delighting in breaking every existing principle of literary style, Lewis introduced such horrible scenes as the one in which an emaciated and crazed Agnes lies buried alive in the vaults of the convent, among the rotting bodies of nuns newly buried, and nursing in her arms the putrid body of her dead infant. Such disgusting scenes appear with alarming regularity in *The Monk*, leading us to the belief that such is the stuff 'Gothic' romances are made of.

The third characteristic Ruskin lists is naturalism, which he explains as 'the love of natural objects for their own sake, and the effort to represent them frankly, ...'82 *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is a fine illustration of the truth of this statement. Picturesque descriptions jostle each other right from the beginning of this romance. As an example we might consider one of the passages which describe St. Aubert and Emily on their way to Beaujeu :

The dawn, which softened the scenery with its peculiar gray tint, now dispersed, and Emily watched the progress of the day, first trembling on the tops of the highest cliffs, then touching them with splendid light, while their sides and the vale below were still wrapt in dewy mist. Meanwhile, the sullen grey of the eastern clouds began to blush, then to redden, and then to glow with a thousand colours, till the golden light darted over all the air, touched the lower points of the mountain's brow, and glanced in long sloping beams upon the valley and its stream. All nature seemed to have awakened from death into life83

Tompkins calls these descriptions in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* 'mannered'. Mannered they may be, but they also reveal the author's love of natural objects for their own sake. Artistic creation of any sort cannot be free from artistic laws. By her mannered descriptions of nature Mrs. Radcliffe 'sought to adorn prose fiction by ... lyrical interpretation of nature ...'⁸⁴ as the Gothic builder, through the carved ornaments within a church, sought to reveal the wonder of Christianity.

Ruskin does not limit naturalism to this alone, but explains that '... the great Naturalist takes the human being in its wholeness, in its mortal as well as its spiritual strength. Capable of sounding and sympathizing with the whole range of its passions, he brings one majestic harmony out of them all ; he represents it fearlessly in all its acts and thoughts, in its haste, its anger, its sensuality and its pride,... there is nothing which he is reluctant to behold, nothing that he is ashamed to confess...'.⁸⁵ Lewis's plot revolves around this kind of naturalism. In 'sympathizing' with human passion and pride, Lewis creates in Ambrosio a character whose insatiability is the root of all the horrible episodes in the novel. It is through the 'majestic harmony' achieved by incidents of rape, incest and murder that Lewis reveals the total moral disintegration of the Monk. The imagery describing various incidents is vivid and riotous, jerking the (18th century) reader into shocked disbelief.

But Ruskin's idea of naturalism is not complete until we consider what he said about what amounts to the 'diseased love' of Naturalism'. '... consider the innumerable groups having reference merely to various forms of passion low or high . for the sake merely of the excitement – that quickening and supplying of the dull spirit that cannot be gained for it but by bathing it in blood, ...'⁸⁶ These lines may be said to be a summing-up of the main purpose of the German 'Shaueromane', the model for *The Monk*, where 'terror is coarsely material and love a theme for jocularity'⁸⁷ and the technique is one of 'heavy-handed grotesqueness, a strained emotionalism and violent assaults on the nerves....'.⁸⁸

If Gothic art's main criterion is truthfulness, how far is Lewis or Walpole or Mrs. Radcliffe successful as Gothic artist? For a novel to be truthful, the characters as well as the situations

in which they interact with each other must seem convincing to the readers. But a Matilda or a Manfred only serves to amuse us, and the situations in which they find themselves are fantastic, to say the least. This happens because these characters are never seen in the round. They are essentially flat characters and react predictably to every situation they are faced with. In *The Castle of Otranto*, Matilda seems scarcely living, Isabella is only a little more animated. The same is true about Emily and Valancourt in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. And as for Montoni, Manfred and Ambrosio, as their relevant stories progress, there is scarcely a black deed they would stop from contemplating. Ambrosio is perhaps the only character who appears more rounded than the rest, by his alternations between gloating lust and remorse; but the bouts of remorse decline steadily as his story proceeds until he comes to the point when he sells his soul to the devil and his remorse (which has never seemed very convincing, if we compare his character to that of Dr. Faustus) is turned into fear of the loss of life.

Even though Lewis succeeds in making Ambrosio more life-like than either Montoni or Manfred, the Monk's character is developed by keeping in mind the need to supply excitement to 'dull spirit'. Mrs. Radcliffe shows greater dignity and moral scruple than either Walpole or Lewis by refusing to accommodate any nerve-shocking incidents in her novel. But in all the three novels, truth is wholly diluted by the love of the unreal, the mysterious. We cannot say, judging by these examples, that the Gothic artist is as firm in his portrayal of actual truth as the Gothic builder.

What Ruskin describes as the grotesque in Gothic art is the 'tendency to delight in fantastic and ludicrous, as well as in sublime, images ...'³⁹ These words echo through our minds as we wade through the pages of a Gothic romance. The reader's impression of the 'Gothic' world is succinctly summed up by Elizabeth MacAndrew when she says, 'it (The Gothic romance) conjures up beings — mad monks, vampires and demons — and settings — forbidding cliffs and glowering buildings, stormy seas and the dizzying abyss....'⁴⁰ The Gothic world is a world alien to normal human beings. In this closed world ghosts appear at the dead of night to be devil an eager and anxious lover, mysterious music is heard in desolate mansions,

beautiful women, running away from tormentors, take refuge in subterranean passages and monks commit incestuous rape on innocent victims with the help of 'Lucifer' in underground vaults with mouldering dead bodies. This is a world where the grotesque seems to be the prevailing rule. Magic and witchcraft are taken as matters of course and man can, in truth, sell off his soul to the devil in order to buy a few moments of pleasure. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is an exception to this rule. Mrs. Radcliffe chose to excite her readers' fancy not by episodes so hair-raising as that of the Bleeding Nun in *The Monk*, or so deliberately Gothic as that of the giant hand in *The Castle of Otranto* but by 'combinations of suspense, mystery and surprise ...'.⁴¹ We are intrigued by the secret that St. Aubert seeks to hide from his daughter, and are bewildered, though unbelieving, by the 'hollow voice' that makes the muleteer drive away as fast as possible from the Chateau Villeroi. And the greatest surprise that Mrs. Radcliffe effects is the revelation that Udolpho is no haunted mansion but the headquarters of the banditti.

Critics account for the obsession with the grotesque in the Gothic romances by saying that it provided the romantic mind with the opportunity of 'probing ... humanity's basic psychological forces ...'.⁴² Elizabeth MacAndrew argues that Walpole, through the grotesque and unnatural world that he paints of a courtly romance, is actually trying to make 'a fictional reality of evil as a psychological state ...'. But to the modern reader the truth seems to be that both Walpole and Lewis were consciously making use of the grotesque to aim at originality. Walpole remained true to this purpose while Lewis lost sight of it in the sensational delight derived from piling horror upon horror and it is said that Mrs. Radcliffe was appalled by the excesses of *The Monk*. "To the warm imagination, the forms which float half-veiled in darkness afford a higher delight than the most distinct scenery the Sun can show" ...⁴³ was what she thought about the matter and thus, naturally, she banished the grotesque from her novels. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, by refusing to circumscribe the imagination of the reader through vivid descriptions, stimulates and sustains the effect of such terror that, as Tompkins says, the mind is led into a 'region of vague sublimity'.

The nature of these novels may be interpreted by the standard of rigidity: to quote Ruskin on Gothic architecture: 'I mean not merely stable, but active rigidity; the peculiar energy which gives tension to movement, ...writhed into every form of nervous entanglement; but even when most graceful, never for an instant languid, always quickset.'⁴⁴ If by this we understand the movement of the plot, *The Monk* is one of the best illustrations an author can offer to his readers. The reader is left breathless by the sheer movement of the plot. From the moment that Ambrosio enters the church of the Capuchins to deliver his sermon to the moment when the river swallows up the 'corse of the despairing Monk', there is no slackening of pace in the narrative. Whatever diversion occurs in the novel is created by the story of Raymond and his adventures; here also Lewis's grip on the action never once loosens. We are not left with a moment for thought.

It is remarkable how Lewis manages to maintain the hectic pace for there are almost no surprises in the plot. Surprise is supplied by the reader's meeting with fresh incidents of horror at every turn of the action and the relentless pace precludes relief from incidents that rack the nerves and violently assault the mind. Compared to this, *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* appear sedate and colourless. In Walpole, the medieval setting, the thunderous villain, the sensitive hero and heroine, ghosts and other wonders are all present but only serve as the backdrop to the tedious battle of good and evil on the centre-stage. Here the action avoids the tortuousness of *The Monk* and lacks its fast pace. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* seems in parts to be a leisurely travelogue⁴⁵ and picks up speed only when the scene shifts to Udolpho.

But a different kind of energy animates *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Tompkins helps us to know what an earlier critic said of Mrs. Radcliffe. "She gave a new emphasis to action," writes Miss McIntyre: "not action in and for itself, ... but action as bringing about complications and resolving them."⁴⁶ Mrs. Radcliffe's treatment of the supernatural forces the mind to be constantly alert and in a state of agonized uncertainty until she provides unravelment and eases the mind. An example is the scene where a mournful Emily, newly returned home after the

death of her father, sits in his room and is agitated by a sudden terror of something supernatural. Mrs. Radcliffe continues :

The silence, which again reigned, made her ashamed of her late fears, and she believed, that her imagination had deluded her, or that she had heard one of those unaccountable noises, which sometimes occur in old houses. The same sound, however, returned ; and, distinguishing something moving towards her, and in the next instant press beside her into the chair, she shrieked ; but her fleeting senses were instantly recalled, on perceiving that it was Manchon who sat by her and who now licked her hands affectionately. ⁴⁷

Such instances of tension building up to a climax and then being released, occur time and again in the novel, never allowing repose to the reader's mind.

Of the three romances under consideration, it is only in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that we find the truth of Ruskin's claim that Gothic art manifests a rigidity that is a 'peculiar energy which gives tension to movement'. To refer again to Tompkins, 'the *raison-d'être* of her books is a mood, the mood of a sensitive dreamer ..."⁴⁸ something quite different from the crude, physical action of *The Monk*.

The last characteristic of the Gothic nature that Ruskin lists is redundancy. On this, the 18th century had much to say. Addison, while travelling through Italy, was appalled by the Cathedral at Siena : " ... nothing in the world can make a prettier show to these who prefer false beauties, and affected ornaments to a noble and majestic simplicity."⁴⁹ Many of his contemporaries endorsed this view. To the neoclassicist anything that was not a fundamental part of a work of art, was not a part of the artistic effect but a redundancy. Paul Frankl made an appreciative reappraisal of the love of decoration in Gothic art : 'If architecture is reduced to include only what is functional, it ceases to be "architecture". The symbolic forms in architecture, ..., are all adornment of the basic functional form of a building.'⁵⁰ To Ruskin, the love of ornamentation of the Gothic builder revealed not merely a 'rude love of decorative accumulation'⁵¹ but 'a magnificent enthusiasm, which feels as if it never could do enough to reach the fulness of its ideal ... '⁵²

Walpole, however, was attracted to medieval architecture because of its ornamental detail. 'To him and his contemporaries the style was defined as a series of ornamental patterns which could be pasted on an existing structure. For Walpole, [building] materials were not an issue; what counted was the surface pattern — this was what made a building Gothic'⁵³ The same may be said of Lewis. Both of them pasted on what they believed to be the Gothic style 'wildly melodramatic exaggerations of ... lurid scenes' and an exotic setting remote in time ... on an essentially sentimental story. Both of them are basically concerned with the depiction of the struggle between 'Sentimental benevolism' and 'Gothic evil'. To emphasize the difference between the two worlds, Lewis accumulates grotesque details one after another, but instead of standing out as relief, the sentimental story is lost in the nightmare created by the 'surface ornamentation'. Walpole's use of decoration allows him an opportunity to create anew a world of vanished glory; Elizabeth MacAndrew, discussing *The Castle of Otranto*, says, 'a Gothic novel is to a medieval romance what an artificial ruin in an 18th century garden was to a genuine one, and Walpole's romance is like his house, consciously fanciful in its medievalism...'.⁵⁴ Walpole and Lewis both use decoration as an end in itself, not as a means to an end, thus vindicating Addison's stand.

Mrs. Radcliffe's use of ornamentation is different. In *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, redundancy results from the frequent bursts of rapture over the beauties of nature. But though these digressions disturb the progress of the plot, Mrs. Radcliffe uses 'Gothic decoration' not for the sake of mere sensation but because she feels she never could do enough to reach the fulness of her ideal. It was Mrs. Radcliffe's aim to invest Terror with Beauty so that 'Beauty refines terror, connects it with dignified associations and prevents it from verging on disgust ...'.⁵⁵

All three romances, *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Monk*, manifest nearly all the elements which Ruskin held to be essential to the Gothic nature. In spite of this, the feeling persists that there is a great difference between a Gothic building and a 'Gothic romance'. The Gothic builder attempted to create something completely new out of an old and established mode. And he was entirely successful in this. When we look at a

Gothic cathedral, we are struck not by the 'Romanesque', but by the 'Gothic' aspect of it. But in spite of its distinctive 'otherness', a 'Gothic' romance seems to be little more than the traditional sentimental novel, dressed in a new garb (*The Monk* is something of an exception. Here the sentimental story is relegated to the background). 'Gothic authors appropriated and refurbished the old stock-in-trade of the sentimental novel...,⁵⁶ the only difference being that in 'Gothic' romances, 'parental tyranny took a more feudal shade, lovers languished in fetters and heroines eloped through subterranean passages.'⁵⁷ There is a common bond between the Gothic romance and the sentimental romance because both, through certain common narrative methods and images, pursued a common purpose — the purpose being to arouse the reader's 'feelings' through situations contrived so as to stir his emotions. Elizabeth MacAndrew illustrates how the two genres borrowed freely from each other with the help of Henry Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigne*.⁵⁸ Where Julia, a 'sentimental' heroine, suffers from premonition and nightmares, while Emily, a 'Gothic' one, suffers from an excess of sentimentality. It may be said with certainty that the first part of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* resembles more *The Man of Feeling* than *The Castle of Otranto*.

These Gothic writers, Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis and Mrs. Radcliffe are well-known as the precursors of what is specially known as The Romantic School. We may say of them, as Sukumar Dutt says of Graveyard poets, 'Their tuning to supernatural themes and motives . . . [is] tentative, exploratory and guided by no common urge . . .'⁵⁹ He continues, 'Their conceptions of the supernatural are distinguished on one hand by a new awareness and sensibility from the conventional use of them by poets of the classical school, and are marked off on the other hand, in their unrelatedness to any whole imaginative background, from later romantic treatment.'⁶⁰ It is only in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that we find a desire to explain the 'irrational and emotional depths of the human mind' with the help of supernatural situations. The influence of the 'Gothic' on the Romantic poets is most understood when we notice Coleridge's handling of the supernatural in poems such as *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *The Eye* of *St. Agnes*, may be considered a direct descendant of *The Castle of*

Otranto as it strives to recreate 'a picture of domestic life and manners during the feudal times, as might actually have existed' and to show it 'chequered and agitated by the action of supernatural.'⁸²

The 'Gothic romance' is important in the history of 19th century romanticism in that it exemplifies a taste for the new at a time when the sensitive human mind was yearning for freedom from the constraints of the prevailing literary culture. The romantic poets brought a degree of perfection to a style of which they cannot claim to be the originators.

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SHAKESPEARE AND RACIALISM

D. C. BISWAS

SHAKESPEARE'S London, being the centre of international commerce like Venice, was a cosmopolitan city, where the Bard might have met all nationalities and races on the streets, like the Italians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Germans, Africans, the Jews, the Welshmen, the Scots and what not ; and having had access to the court-scandal possibly through the Dark Lady enjoyed the joke centering round the Russian ambassador who made an amorous advance to a Queen's maid, nicknamed 'the Empress of Muscovy'. From his earliest comedy, *The Comedy of Errors*, to the last play, *The Tempest*, the foreigners crowd his plays : America is only once mentioned in *The Comedy* in a humorous reference to the Spanish expedition and *The Tempest* might have been based on the Voyagers' report of the discovery of the Barmudas.

Let us look for a moment at the peoples' names in what is generally regarded as the most universal of Shakespeare's plays—*Hamlet*, and notice with wonder the Bard's cosmopolitan interest even in the naming of the characters : Claudius and Marcellus are Latin ; Laertes, from Homer, Greek ; Ophelia Greekish ; Horatio, 'more an antique Roman than a Dane' ; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are German ; Fortinbras is a French derivation ; Fransisco Italian ; and Osric alone is Danish. As for English, Gertrude is Anglo-saxon and so is Hamlet. Whatever we may make of that, we find Hamlet and his mother are English and about them swirl the universe of cosmopolitan names. The crux of this universal tragedy is the story of the mother and her son. It symbolizes Shakespeare's work and his interest. The Bard of Avon had his feet firmly planted on his native soil ; but his imagination, the highest quality in a poet, had its freest play in the Prince of Denmark with whom, more than with any other creation, he identified himself. What better evidence of his cosmopolitan interest, his transcendental humanism could there be than this ?

True it is that Shakespeare makes mirth of different nationalities and races through Portia's playful description of her

Ed. Note : See list of contributors.

suitors who come from various parts of the Globe including England ; also repeats the comic technique in the episodic drama *Love's Labour's Lost* mainly concerned with the exposure of human affectations. While thus a bundle of races and nationalities come to acquire a local habitation, the plays gain in comical dimension.

Thus proceeds the sprightly maiden Portia whose heart being engaged elsewhere can air her views so lightly ; the Italian (Neapolitan Prince) 'doth nothing talk but of his horses', he is too much horse, horsy ; and the greatest distinction he claims to have is that he 'can shoe his horse himself'. The French lord is much too mercurial by temper—'If a thistle sings, he falls straight capering'.. he will fence with his own shadow'. Coming to the German suitor (the county Palatine) Portia points to his lack of the sense of humour : 'He hears merry tales, and smiles not... I fear he will prove the weeping philosopher when he grows old'. This lack of the sense of humour Charles Lamb noticed in the Scotchmen, whom however Portia dismisses with 'a box on the ear' and the lack of trees in Scotland, her exceptional barrenness—the stock joke of Dr. Johnson—is laughably located in the hairy Kitchen-wench's palm in *The Comedy of Errors*. By way of digression, Charles Lamb once being invited to attend the anniversary of the Scottish poet Burns, where Burns's son was expected, casually quipped that he wished the father rather than the son were present, when four Scotchmen stood up one after another to say 'that was impossible because the poet was dead'.

Portia does not spare the Englishmen either, for their lack of knowledge in foreign languages, and this charge was partly true, for even Shakespeare picked up his smattering in French from the London streets, which seldom exceeds such expressions as 'Bon Jour, Monsieur Le Beau'. Portia also satirizes the Englishmen's craze for imitating the sartorial habits of foreigners—'How oddly he is suited ? I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round-hose in France, his bonnet in Germany and his behaviour everywhere.' The implication is that if she were to marry an Englishman, heaven forbid—she would marry an international personality without any national sartorial distinction. The Englishman's penchant for foreign travels, especially in Italy,

became a topical joke and another naughty lady, Rosalind, makes mirth of Monsieur Traveller, the melancholy Jaques, by cutting short his effusive claims. Shakespeare carried the joke to the farcical extreme when the Trinculo-Stephano-Caliban expedition miscarried owing to fine linen hoisted by Prospero near the opening of his den.

While Shakespeare makes mirth even of the Frenchmen and also the Welshmen's peculiar pronouncing of English words making them come alive on the stage in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, the Frenchman pays back by mocking the Englishmen in *Henry V* as 'great eaters of beef': 'They gulped down any quantity of beef like their hounds, leaving their wits with their wives'. Yes, Falstaff apart, the ladies, even English ladies are more witty than men. Look to Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page in *Merry Wives of Windsor*, a typically English middleclass play, in which even the invincible Sir John knew to his cost what it was to make amorous advances to married ladies.

Look to the comedy of foreigners' pronunciation : Caius, the French doctor in *Merry Wives of Windsor* challenges — 'By gar, it is a *shallange* ! I will cut his *troat* in *de park* and teach that scurvy Jacknape to *meddle or make* ! The French courtier Le Beau's pronouncing 'sport' as 'spot' tickles the princesses Rosalind and Celia to a lot of punning which confounds the Frenchman. The Welsh parson has also his definite contribution to the scene of Falstaff's discomfiture. As the fat knight emerges from Ford's house disguised as the woman of Brainford, and beaten black and blue and all the colours of the rainbow by the jealous husband, pat comes the Welshman's confirmation that the persecuted lady was really a witch — 'I think the *Oman* is a witch indeed ; I like not when a *Oman* has a great *peard*, I spy a great *peard* under the muffler'. When Ford was still raging in his jealous fit the French physician seems somewhat perplexed because he could not make out what all the fuss was about ; for there is no such thing as sexual jealousy in his country, he firmly asserted. Possibly, there is no such thing in high society in any of the developed countries to-day, and France led the way, as she still does, in dictating the ladies' fashions in dress all over the world.

Shakespeare's Welshmen are interesting characters by themselves and have a special claim on our attention. Look to the grippingly comical scene in *I Henry IV* where Mortimer married to Glendower's daughter cannot understand what his wife says, nor does the lady follow her husband. It is Glendower with superior knowledge of English who serves as an interpreter. So it is not Falstaff alone who makes a monopoly of all the laughter in the play; the irrespressible comic spirit breaks forth in unexpected places. Glendower might have polished his English by his long sojourn at the English court, but his superstitious rusticity is so ingrained in his nature that no sophistication can wipe it out. And this leads to an amusing quarrel with the hot-headed Hotspur who would not allow him his tall claims:

Glendower : At my nativity.
 The point of heaven was full of fiery shapes
 Of burning crussits : and at my birth
 The frame and huge foundation of the earth
 Shaked like a coward.

Hotspur : Why so it would have done at
 the same season if your mother's
 cat had kittened, though you
 yourself had never been born.

Glendower : I can call spirits from vasty deep.

Hotspur : Why, so can I or can any man.

I Henry IV, III, i, l. 13, ff.

These petty squabbles over insignificant trifles when graver issues like a national opposition where at stake are not infrequent even to-day; but Shakespeare had little historical basis for this; his imagination caught hold of some racial traits and made a comic capital of them.

So, Shakespeare has given distinct speech-habits, pronunciation, mannerisms to make the typical racial specimens come alive on the stage. We have a fantastical Spaniard Don Armado, Shakespeare's earliest specimen of the Braggart, ultimately akin to the Miles Gloriosus of classical comedy — 'a man of fine-new words, fashion's own knight'. Also Shylock, as Otto Jespersen has so nicely pointed out, who has a distinctive speech-habit. There were Jews in England in Shakespeare's time, but not many to enable the poet to pick up Jewish idioms. Apart from actual Hebraic references in Shylock's

talk, Shakespeare has created for him a number of verbal mannerisms that are strange. But when all is said about the Jewish gaberdine that he wears and his mannerism he remains throughout very human even in his hatred, which Marlowe's Barabas is not. At the close of the trial scene our heart goes out in sympathy for the ruined man. This is a measure of Shakespeare's broad sense of humanity which raised him above all racial considerations.

In the same play Shakespeare has created another interesting specimen of an alien — Prince of Morocco, a Moor, whose highflown speech at once distinguishes him from all others in the play :

Mislike me not for my complexion
The shadowed livery of the burnished Sun,
To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.

The Merchant of Venice, II, i, l. 1, ff.

Full of exotic references to the Sophy, Sultan Solymon, Lichas, he is an alien in his speech-habit. Afterwards Shakespeare built a whole play around a Moor and called it *Othello*. Othello is definitely a noble Moor with his braggartism subdued, and his is one of the sublimest tragedies Shakespeare has ever written. Nonetheless his speech is un-English. Shakespeare has given him a language of exotic references like the Anthropophagi, the cannibals and also a music all its own. When he speaks of 'Promethian heat', 'monumental alabaster', we feel it is no speech of a barbarian; but it is nonetheless the speech of an alien — impassioned and highstrung. To go by Jespersen's marks of the masculinity of English language, no Englishman would utter such lines as Othello did :

If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings,
I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
To pray at fortune.

Othello, III, 3, 258 ff.

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Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
N'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont ...

Ibid., III, 3, 441 ff.

Bernard Shaw has mocked at the passage, which he calls 'the hulla baloo of consonants and vowels — Propontic and Hellespont, that

nobody cares for, especially when people have their appointments to keep, their buses to catch. But even he admits that 'tested by the brain it is ridiculous ; tested by the ear it is sublime'. Shaw argues that the sophisticated Sicilian Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* is 'an unmistakable study of a jealous man from life'. Othello is indeed larger than life : his torture is self-destructive — it engulfs us ; Leontes's torture is more intellectual ; there is a remoteness in the passion which does not touch our heart. It is the exuberance of an oriental mind that communicates the pangs of an agonized soul, torn between love and suspicion straight to all hearts. And Shakespeare has rightly chosen a noble Moor to give poignant expression to the suicidal agony of the jealous husband, to which no Englishman with his close-lipped business-like utterances could have done justice.

Although Shakespeare was quite alive to the racial mannerism of a Welshman, a Jew, a Moor as of any other, who impress us both as an individual and as a specimen of the race they belong to, he could also make any of them the mouthpiece of his profoundest thoughts. Thus the magician-duke of Milan, Prospero, is by no means an Englishman but through him Shakespeare presents his valedictory message. Rightly has Keats found in the 'Bard of Avon an ideal dramatic poet who took as much delight in conceiving an Imogen as an Iago ; a Shylock as a Moor. His equidistant relationship with all his characters shows his broad sense of humanity. Whether we will it or not, Shakespeare's cosmopolitanism, his universality, is coterminous with his supreme role as a man of the theatre. And the poet turns a prophet when in his last play he imagines a 'brave new world' in which even the half-man and half-beast Caliban the representative of the aboriginal race, is not beyond redemption.

DEFOSSILIZING CONSTANTIN LEVIN

DR. ASHUTOSH BANERJEE

FICTIONAL characters, if they are lovable or interesting — most of all, when they are both—receive on their arrival a warm welcome and a few patronizing pats on the back from readers and critics. But as time passes and the critical literature on them grows in volume, each such character disintegrates into several contradictory ones created not by their authors, but by critics who replace them with figures of their own making. Even at the moment of initial welcome, a fictional character may be substantially altered by the personal fads and prejudices of individual critics. Reading some of the estimates of the character of Constantin Levin in *Anna Karenina*, I was struck by the patent injustice done to the Tolstoy character by many of the critics and reviewers. I have, therefore, felt called upon to dynamite this accretion of critical literature in an effort to get back to Tolstoy's Levin. The trouble with such characters as Levin or Pierre Bezuhov or Prince Andrey is that they are painted, if not larger than life, at any rate quite as large as life itself and an assessment of such a character requires space that is unavailable to the writer of a critical essay. But it is necessary to brave this obstacle of length and try and rehabilitate the original Tolstoy character, since we are supposed to deal not with an imaginary character of the critics' making, but with the one that the novelist himself had painted.

Critics of *Anna Karenina* frequently point out that it is in fact two novels—one, that of Anna, Vronsky and Karenin, and the other, that of Kitty and Levin. Some would even go further and claim that it is really *three* novels — since Oblonsky's affairs, domestic and official, take up considerable space too.⁹ The first two stories are, in many respects, antithetical to each other—Anna's illustrating the precarious course of an extramarital *grand passion*, and Levin's, the even tenor of a truthful marriage. Apart from this, however, the men share many of their concerns with

each other, so much so that one early critic even claimed that both Vronsky and Levin were Tolstoy's self-portraits.³

It is true that of all the characters in the novel Levin is the one, the inner workings of whose mind are exposed to the most searching and sustained light of analysis and enquiry. Levin is also the one who may be said to be more than a type. On a purely factual level, Levin has the last word in a huge novel that meanders through innumerable incidents and negotiates a vast concourse of characters, major and minor. Levin also represents the stable level-headed world whose equilibrium is upset temporarily by Anna, although the two worlds act and react upon each other in a sustained and complex manner.

That Levin was the novelist's fictional *alter ego* was pointed out by an early French reviewer :

It is Tolstoy, with his search for the meaning and truth of life who is drawn in the figure of Konstantin Levin.⁴

And again :

Tolstoy and Levin were both illuminated by the light of faith and found in it the source of spiritual peace and the real meaning of life.⁵

Levin evoked a bewildering variety of responses from the earliest critics of the novel. Many of them found him charming and adopted a patronizing attitude to him, even verbally cuddling him. Thus Avseenko wrote in *Russian World* :

Levin himself is partially the cause of this [the slow movement of the story in the parts dealing with his farming], or rather his passive nature, lacking in any drive. Such people are very engaging but in the main their lives are without much interest because there are so few facts to relate in them.⁶

Again Chuyko wrote in *Voice* :

I think that Levin is a remarkably alive person ; there is not only nothing lacking in him but on the contrary something too much, namely that great Russian lymph, a scrofulous passion and an absence of impulse or irritability. This trait marks both Levin's character and his actions.⁷

There were others who found Levin insipid, uninteresting and unenterprising. Tkachov, attacking Tolstoy's aristocraticism in *Affair*, found Levin lacking in intellectual energy. Commenting

on Levin's projected book on agricultural reform, Tkachov predicts :

One can see from the outset and without fear of being mistaken one can say that even if the book is finished it will be full of confusion, but it is more likely that it will never be written and remain but a vain hope. This conjecture is supported by the following argument : in order to train oneself sensibly for writing books it is essential that one should have a mind capable of reading what others have written and this is precisely what Levin lacks. On this matter the author is interestingly sincere. Articles of a serious nature have always caused unutterable tedium to Levin's apathetic, vague brain.⁶

Many of these reviews, one must remember, were written half-way through the novel's publication and could not but be lopsided. But even those which were written after the publication of *Anna Karenina* in book-form, were not necessarily more rounded. It is in the very nature of journalistic reviews to be gratuitously pontifical. Shevitch, summarizing the role of Levin and Kitty, wrote in the *North American Review* :

The young Mrs. Levin becomes an utterly prosaic and even somewhat slovenly *mater familias* ; her husband remains what he always had been, a quiet country gentleman, ignoring entirely all manner of social 'problems' or political questions, raising his corn and potatoes with the persistency, if not with the civic courage, of a Cincinnatus. And at the close of the book we seem to hear the author exclaiming : "Go and do thou likewise !" *

And Shevitch goes on to accuse Tolstoy of moral shallowness.

Unfortunately, most of the above interpretations are impatient, tendentious ones based on a partial and half-hearted reading of the text. While reviewers may base their work on a slovenly reading of the text in order to keep their pots boiling, academic critics can offer no such excuse. Indeed, in recent years, there have been extended interpretations by the second category of critics who have taken pains to read the text closely enough.

John Bayley in *Tolstoy and the Novel* (1966) treats Levin rather as a thread in the texture of the novel than as an individual. His study of the thematic structure of the novels obliterates the view of the characters as individuals. They exist as foils to each other and as elements in extended metaphors. Levin never stands up on his

own two feet, but is propped up by contrasted characters and thematic designs. Indeed, Bayley takes his study of structure to fanciful lengths. Interpreting the Epilogue to *Anna Karenina* as illustrative of a general urge for self-destruction, Bayley says :

Indeed, we even have the strange feeling that Anna kills herself because Levin is tempted to do so — that Tolstoy's iron distinction between individuals has lapsed, and that Anna's act is not personal to herself but rather the culmination of a generalised urge.¹⁰

This may be a possible way of looking at the novel's ending, but by Bayley's own confession, Tolstoy was jealous of the individual identities of his characters. And Bayley may have been chasing the metaphors a little too jealously and rather too far. Even as he concedes Levin a considerable degree of individual personality, Bayley couples him with Anna again :

There is a further strange parallel between Levin's stream of consciousness after his revelation and that of Anna in her ride through the streets on the way to her death at the station. Like Levin, Anna has a sudden revelation of what her situation really is. A bright light seems suddenly turned on herself, Vronsky and Karenin, and the clarity with which she sees herself and them gives her pleasure.¹¹

However evident such parallelisms may be and however relevant to an enjoyment of the novel may be Bayley's insistence on the structure of themes and metaphors that unites the stories of so many characters, it remains possible and necessary to view the major characters separately as individuals. Indeed, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that *Anna Karenina* is not several different novels between the same covers, but *one* novel — that of Constantin Dmitrich Levin into which have been woven the stories of Anna, Vronsky and Oblonsky. The eponymous heroine, it is true, won many hearts and Tolstoy himself is on record with the confession that he was more than a little in love with his heroine. Bayley has gone a step further to claim that

Like Flaubert with his heroine, Tolstoy — had he been given to such comments — could have said : "Madame Karenine, c'est moi "

For Tolstoy had begun to see himself in Anna's position, separated from his own kind by his growing sense of personal crisis, and already aware of the possibility of a further and more fundamental separation.¹²

But Anna only represents one facet of Tolstoy's spiritual Odyssey. The real identification is unmistakably that of Tolstoy with Levin. Levin at once represents his creator and Everyman. For Tolstoy, like Levin, was intensely aware of his own commonplaceness and it filled him with as much wonder as did his genius. Levin, of course, is not represented as a genius. But his quest for the truth is as genuine as it is unrelenting. His more general function in the novel is to represent the clam firmament across which Anna blazes a trail like a meteor. Speirs perceived this and recorded it in the closing paragraph of the second chapter on *Anna Karenina* in his *Tolstoy and Chekhov* :

Tolstoy founds his work upon the great elementary conditions of human life which will always be the same. The place of man in the natural world, the transitions from youth to age, the passing generations, birth, marriage and death, the interconnection between the life of the country and of the town and city — Tolstoy is constantly reminding us of these last we should lose sight of them amid the minutiae of special moral and social questions which he raises. Everything rests upon the most stable foundation. Tolstoy has a lordly contempt for quibbling. The function of the Levin side of *Anna Karenina* is to form the foundation upon which all else rests. It is not a sub-plot in the ordinary way, for in a sense it is larger than the main structure ... ¹³.

The novel's Eight Parts have 239 chapters in all and Levin personally appears in as many as 108 of them, while Anna appears only in 77—she is altogether absent from the last part—Vronsky in 70 and Karenin only in 42 ! Although Levin is introspective and concerned with his own affairs for much of the time, he does witness part of the drama of passion and is mentioned by others, compared with others, notably Vronsky, and warmly championed by Darya Alexandrovna in a scene where Svyazhsky and Vronsky speak slightly of him in his absence.¹⁴ Levin represents stable, old-world values. We meet him for the first time at Oblonsky's office in chapter 5 of Part One. He is introduced to us as a strongly-built, broad-shouldered man with a curly beard¹⁵, shy rather gawky. A great pal of Oblonsky's, he is in some respects, the antithesis of Oblonsky. Levin's gaucherie in company is as evident as Oblonsky's ease and grace. Oblonsky's assurance is not unrelated to a certain shallowness and Levin's irritability is

concomitant with a certain depth of character; but it would be as easy to take the one for *savoir-faire* as it would be to take the other for rusticity. They are old friends always delighted to see each other and yet, secretly despising each other's way of life :

Levin always arrived in Moscow in a state of agitation, in a hurry, rather ill at ease, and irritated by his own want of ease, and usually with some totally new and unexpected outlook on things in general. Oblonsky was amused at this and liked it. In just the same way, Levin in his heart despised both his friend's town life and official duties, which he considered futile and which he ridiculed'¹⁶

When Oblonsky introduces Levin to his colleagues, we gather that the latter is

an active member of the *Zemstvo* [County Council], one of the new order, an athlete who can lift a hundred-and-eighty-pound weight with one hand, a cattle-breeder, a sportsman, and brother to Sergei Ifanich Koznyshev [a writer famous throughout Russia],¹⁷

But Levin immediately informs us that he has left the *Zemstvo*, because it is nothing but a plaything. They play at being a parliament... They engage to dine together and Oblonsky tips Levin off about the Shcherbatskys' whereabouts, as he knows Levin is in love with Kitty Shcherbatsky, Oblonsky's *belle-seur*.

It is necessary to clear the debris of tendentious criticism in order to be able to reinstate Tolstoy's Levin. Avseenko's allegation, for example, that Levin's life is uneventful would be true if only sensational events were counted as events. At that rate, Petritsky's or Vasenka Veslovsky's youthful escapades would be more deserving of record than Levin's soul-searching and Sviazhsky's or Vronsky's cocksure manoeuvrings in local elections would be better as the staple of fiction than Levin's need to dive deeper into basic issues. But the simple fact is that Levin's life is far from being devoid of facts ; we have glimpses in turn of his dabbling in the affairs of the *Zemstvo*, his University life during which he was in love in turn with all the three Shcherbatsky sisters—Dolly, Natalie, and Kitty, his eventual proposal of marriage to the last and her initial rejection of him, his farming life on his estate in the Karazinsky district, his cattle-breeding, his toying with the idea of marrying various country girls, his skiing and other athletic activities, his interest in contemporary issues such as Pan-Slavism and

the Slavonic wars; his abortive attempt at writing a book on agricultural labour, his deep spiritual self-questioning, his eventual acceptance by Kitty and their marriage, his visit abroad, his love-and-hate encounters with Vronsky, his convivialities in the club, his tentative probings into the workings of local self-government elections, his defensive and shy arguments with more practised aficionados of local politics such as Sviazhsky, Snetkov and Koznyshov, his perception of the dents in the armours of these men and their self-contradiction, especially Sviazhsky's which considerably confuses Levin since he admires him and would have followed him but for these contradictions, the frustrations and contradictions of his conjugal life, his farming experiments and his domesticity; his shooting and hunting, his visit to Anna, his quarrels with Kitty, his ministrations to his ailing and eventually dying brother Nikolai, the experience of the latter's death, the equally apocalyptic experience of the birth of a son, his disappointment at the inadequacy of the joy of fatherhood, his spiritual troubles and the difficulty he experiences in reconciling faith with science, his performance as householder and host, his mild exasperation at the occasional presence under his roof of too many Shcherbatsky's and too few Levins; his carefully delicate handling of the importunate Veslovsky who flirts with Kitty and his eventual throwing out of the youngster, his fondness for his Freisian cow Pava and his dog Laska, his kindness to his old servants—Agatha Mihailovna, his old nurse, in particular—, his exertions on behalf of the extravagant Oblonsky, his admiration for and deference towards Lvov and Natalie, his solicitude for the much-wronged Dolly, his exertions on behalf of his sister; his agonizing at the local elections where he fails to understand many of the manoeuvres but is saddened by the excitement and vindictiveness, his semi-mystical notions about the Russian peasants, relation to land which his notions of his relation to land as landlord, his suggestion that Kitty should make over her portion of the Shcherbatsky estate to Dolly to help the latter tide over her embarrassment, his reading of Physics and Astronomy and of Philosophy, the sudden revelation brought to him by a peasant's simple words of faith, and his final acceptance of the futility of life and the inevitability of faith—these added up to a character that is universal

in its appeal and bewildering and wholly human in its contradictions and it would be difficult to think of a character who is more involved or more omnipresent.

Chuyko's appreciation of Levin errs in the other direction. Levin may be the scrofulous Russian — although an anonymous Princess in the novel calls Oblonsky the typical Russian¹⁸ — but he is irritable and impulsive enough. His lack of confidence which sometimes has all the appearance of an inferiority complex, frequently makes him irritable, especially during debates: Thus Levin and Oblonsky secretly despise each other's occupation:

But the difference lay in the fact that Oblonsky, as he was doing the same as everyone else, laughed with confident good humour, while Levin, not feeling so sure of himself, now and then got angry.¹⁹

The same irritation characterizes many of Levin's discussions with Nikolai and Koznyshev. Tkachov's gratuitously insulting criticism, on the other hand, abandons Tolstoy's text in the pursuit of a chimerical Levin of his own creation. Tkachov's prediction that Levin will never write his book on agricultural reform proves correct enough, but not for the reason Tkachov bases his prediction on, viz., that Levin lacks a mind "capable of reading what others have written." There are innumerable evidences in the novel of Levin's habits of reading. But his reading is not the relentless time-bound pursuit of one branch of learning with a specific purpose to the exclusion of every other. His reasons for reading are more fundamental. He seeks answers to basic questions of life and death rather than to technical questions about specific branches of knowledge. Like a philosopher he seeks wisdom, not knowledge and for the more modern commodity of information he seems to have little use. He reads cursorily, always trying to relate what he reads to larger questions about the meaning of life. Thus soon after his return home from Moscow where his proposal of marriage is rejected by Kitty, Levin is discovered reading Tyndall's *Treatise on Heat*, apparently not for the first time, as his old nurse Agatha Mihailovna gives him all the news and Tolstoy affords the reader a view of Levin's stream of consciousness:

He listened and read his book and kept in mind the whole sequence of ideas inspired by what he was reading. It was Tyndall's

Treatise on Heat. He remembered how he had criticised Tyndall for being so pleased with himself over his experiments and for his lack of a philosophic outlook. And suddenly he found himself thinking joyfully that in a couple of years he would have two Freisian cows in the herd and Pava herself might still be alive; there would be a dozen young cows by Berkut and with the three others — Splendid! He took up his book again.

"All right, let us admit that electricity and heat are the same thing: but can we substitute the one for the other in solving an equation? No. Well, so what then? One can instinctively feel the connexion between all the forces of nature ... How extraordinarily nice it will be when Pava's calf has grown into a red-speckled cow ... " 20

This passage illustrates two important traits of his mind — his need to set up all knowledge into a complete system and his habit of wandering off to the trivia of his daily occupations — especially farming. Levin's reading and what he makes of it remain on the purely amateurish level. He discusses Physics, the theory of agriculture and philosophy — specially the last — with Agatha Mihalovna which indicates that he reads mainly for pleasure or diversion digesting his reading and bringing its fruits to the level of understanding of the old peasant woman 21

In Part III, Chapter 28, Levin is seen going into Svyazhsky's library to get the books on the labour question that the latter recommended, but they get enmeshed in debate and we are denied a view of Levin at these books and his reaction to them until later (ch. 29). We discover that Levin has not only read all these books but also others on political economy and Socialism" but, as he had expected, found nothing in them related to his undertaking." 22 Reading Mill and others merely confirms his suspicion that European solutions will not work in Russian conditions:

Political economy told him that the laws by which Europe had developed and was developing her wealth were universal and absolute. Socialist teaching told him that development along those lines leads to ruin and neither of them offered the smallest enlightenment as to what he, Levin, and all the Russian peasants and landowners were to do with their millions of hands and millions of acres, to make them as productive as possible for the common good. 23

In this, perhaps, Levin's conclusions are those of a Slavophil rather than of a Westernizer. Tolstoy specifically mentions that "having once taken the subject up", Levin "conscientiously read

everything bearing on it and intended to make a journey abroad in the autumn in order to study land systems further, on the spot."²⁴ So much for Tkachov's sniping at Levin's alleged lack of the habit of reading.

And now for Shevitch's smug and patronizing comment on the Levin couple quoted above. By comparison with someone like Anna, Kitty may appear prosaic or slovenly, but her husband finds her attractive enough as does that light-weight of social intercourse, Vasenka Veslovsky, her cousin. The majority of matrons do tend to become prosaic or slovenly—Dolly does, beyond any doubt—but Tolstoy certainly gives no hint that he intends Kitty, the apple of her father's eye and the idol of her husband's home to dwindle into the same state. But, of course, our concern here is with Levin, not with Kitty. It would not require a great deal of exertion to demolish Shevitch's tendentious and muddled allegation that Levin is an entirely private person uninterested in social or political issues. On the contrary, Levin takes an unfailing interest in every conceivable issue of his day, albeit in an amateurish way and chiefly from the point of view of a conservative landlord. He takes a great deal of interest in the election of the marshal of the province (Part VI, chs. 26-30) and although alienated by the go-getting ruthlessness of men like Snetkov, Sviazhsky, Vronsky and others, he succeeds in his blundering way, in puzzling out the implications of the electioneering manoeuvres: viz., that it was necessary for the public good to get rid of the marshal of the province; that to get rid of the marshal it was necessary to have a majority of votes; that to get a majority of votes it was necessary to secure Flerov's vote; that to secure the recognition of Flerov's right to vote they must decide on the interpretation to be put on the act (ch. 28) and so on. We have already seen why he left the *Zemstvo* although at one time he took a great deal of interest in its activities. We have already discussed in detail his interest in agricultural labour and improved methods of cultivation; with Koznyshev and Sviazhsky he hotly debates whether education should precede or follow economic improvement; with the Communist Nikolay he talks about Communism (Part III, ch. 32) and feels that he himself "was trying to hedge between Communism and existing forms and that this was hardly

possible."²⁵ But much more than this theorizing, what is really germane to an understanding of Levin's character is his feeling of hopeless concern for his brother who is dangerously ill. Koznyshev gives him credit for a great deal more than merely "raising his corn and potatoes." :

You have changed in many respects since your marriage, and for the better, but you have remained true to your passion for defending the most paradoxical theories.²⁶

And Koznyshev, an intellectual and Levin's half-brother, who has known him from childhood, should know what he is talking about, which is more than one can say for Shevitch. Ché Anna Levin talks animatedly about French art.

Far from being complacent, as Shevitch suggests, Levin is driven to distraction by his doubts and uncertainties. Towards the end of the novel, his spiritual agony becomes a matter for concern for Kitty : she feels he reads too much philosophy which merely confuses him and makes belief difficult :

It must be because he thinks too much. And he thinks too much because of being solitary. He's always alone, always.²⁷

This spiritual anguish of Levin fills two whole chapters in the last part of the novel (chs. 8 & 9). Apparently, Levin's encounter with scientific theories at the University made him begin questioning the fundamental tenets of religion, but the death of his brother along a crisis in his vision of life which seems unresolvable by any scientific explanation. He feels that the scientific theories he knows about do nothing towards explaining the meaning of life :

These terms and the theories associated with them were very useful for intellectual purposes. But they gave no guidance for life and Levin suddenly felt like a person who has exchanged his warm fur coat for a muslin garment, and out in the frost for the first time is immediately convinced, not by arguments but with his whole being that he is as good as naked and must inevitably perish miserably.²⁸

What is worse,

He was vaguely conscious that what he called his new convictions were not merely ignorance but that they were part of a whole order of ideas which actually stood in the way of the knowledge he needed.²⁹

But he still retains enough clarity of mind to be able to formulate the problem crisply :

"If I do not accept the answers Christianity gives to the questions of my life, what answers do I accept ?" And in the whole arsenal of his convictions he failed to find not only any kind of answer but anything resembling an answer. He was in the position of a man seeking food in a toyshop or at a gun-smith's.³⁰

He envies other believers among his acquaintances their serenity and finds it inexplicable. His doubts and uncertainties grow in volume and intensity until he reaches a stage when he has serious thoughts of suicide ; the enormity of the scientific fact that man is a mere "organic cell" in infinite time, infinite matter and in infinite space" strikes him as a cruel joke perpetrated by an evil power and the only way to beat that power is death :

And Levin, a happy father and husband, in perfect health, was several times so near suicide that he had to hide a rope lest he be tempted to hang himself, and would not go out with a gun for fear of shooting himself.³¹

Another dilemma that oppresses him frequently is his experience of the irreconcilability of idea and execution.³²

It is eventually a peasant's simple words of faith that make him see the light :

At the peasant's words about Platon living for his soul, rightly, in God's way, dim but important thoughts crowded into his mind, as if they had broken loose from some place where they had been locked up, and all rushing forward towards one goal, whirled in his head, blinding him with their light.³³

Levin's faith has to be viewed in contrast with several religious stances existing among his friends and relations. There are first of all, the believers who are not assailed by any doubts and whose belief gives a serenity and kindness to their nature, viz., Kitty, the old Princess, Dolly, Koznyshev, Lvov ; then there are some whose religion is of a narrower and more farcical nature, though Tolstoy does not actually satirize this group in spite of an undercurrent of irony that runs through the scenes of their religious observances — Karenin and Countess Lydia Ivanovna and the French medium Landau, alias Count Bezzubov. Their proceedings strike one as phoney and a post-Freudian age would have recognized immediately

that Karenin's relations with Lydia border on perversion. Much more tolerable as a group of religious non-practitioners are the hedonists including Oblonsky, Vronsky and Anna. They are people of ease and grace and although never denying allegiance to the Christian faith, they seem in the main not to be touched by it in any significant way. Karenin's personal creed is a dry, narrow one of absolute correctness as far as the letter goes, but blind and evasive where the spirit is concerned. Vronsky is touched by Karenin's forgiveness after the birth of Anna's daughter and even attempts suicide out of remorse, but he remains a passionate, urbane hedonist like Anna, just as Karenin continues to be a dry, narrow, unforgiving man of great rectitude. Shevitch's snide remark that Tolstoy intends to present Levin as a model of pious industry and to tell the reader, "Go and do thou likewise" in the language of the parable simply flies in the face of the text. It would be difficult to think of a more blatant or more complete misrepresentation of Tolstoy's intentions. If there is one thing Tolstoy never gives any hint of attempting to do in *Anna Karenina*, it is to impart instruction to the reader through the character of Levin. His pedagogical or preaching instincts found expression in his occasional pamphlets like *What Shall We Do Then?* (1884-86), the Introduction to his novel *The Decembrists* (1884), *The Gospel in Brief* (1881), *Draft Plan for the Organization of Public Schools* (1849) etc., his text-books for school-children like the *Primer* (1872) and *New Primer* and the *Russian Reader* (both published in 1875) and in his occasional and uneven endeavours to run a school for the serfs on his estate at Yasnaya Polyana. His *Primer* at least, Victor Shklovsky tells us, was a much more serious and scientific effort to teach Russian children how to think correctly.⁵⁴ Through the character of Levin Tolstoy was attempting to represent some of his own spiritual agonizing and his own blundering but relentless quest for a satisfactory philosophy of life.⁵⁵

Tolstoy apparently wanted Levin to represent the archetypal householder. He is the marrying type as opposed to Vronsky who never accepts the marital yoke and Oblonsky who treats marriage cavalierly and makes a mess of his domestic life. In several details Tolstoy's courtship and marriage correspond with Levin's. Levin, like Tolstoy, gives his bride-to-be his old diaries to read, the

confessions in which upset her as they did Sofya Andreyevna.³⁷ Levin, like Tolstoy, uses initials of words to propose marriage, but unlike Sofya Andreyevna, Kitty understands every word of it and answers in similar style.³⁸ Also, like Tolstoy, Levin is delayed in his arrival at church for his wedding by the lack of a starched shirt. Other parallels would not be difficult to trace. Constantin Levin is also the only one among the brothers to marry and start a family. Nikolay dies, unwed, unregenerate and in bad company—of tuberculosis, like two of Tolstoy's own brothers. Koznyshev, Levin's half-brother, is an intellectual and better organized than the Bolshevik Nikolay, but in his abortive courtship with Varenka, demonstrates his total unfitness for marriage. R. F. Christian contrasts "the intuitively wise"³⁹ Levin with the intellectuals:

Tolstoy has no patience with the professional practitioners of wisdom, because the problems do not touch them closely.⁴⁰

But R. W. Mathewson, Jr. only gives qualified approval to Levin, among others, as a 'positive hero':

It might seem that Tolstoy's 'blundering' heroes, Pierre Bezukhov in *War and Peace* and Levin in *Anna Karenina*, qualify as affirmative figures. But the modest lesson they affirm—that life, defined in terms of love, family and work, is somehow preferable to death—lacks the combative spirit and the specifically social orientation sought by the radical critics.⁴¹

But he claims that the fact that Levin's

final discovery of 'the meaning of life' ... has the quality of a desperate assertion shot through with uncertainty, not of a statement of unqualified belief

is confirmed by Tolstoy's own later

spiritual crisis, in the course of which despair at the approach of death came close to gaining supremacy ...⁴²

But that again would seem to be letting oneself step out of the novel and be enmeshed in Intentional Fallacy.

Although not a very simple character himself, Levin somewhat naively expects other people to be all of a piece, especially those whom he admires, such as Sviazhsky. He is baffled by the fact that Sviazhsky cannot be neatly categorized as either a fool or a knave. He tries to probe the man by subjecting him to a series

of catechisms which embarrass the urbane Sviazhsky, a man of considerable talent, who does not like to be drawn to that extent. Levin's error lies in assuming that it is one thing, one belief that makes such a man as Sviazhsky tick :

Levin tried to understand him, and could not understand him, and looked at him and his life as at a living enigma.

Levin and he were very friendly, and so Levin used to venture to sound Sviazhsky, to try to get at the very foundation of this view of life ; but it was always in vain. Every time Levin tried to penetrate beyond the outer chambers of Sviazhsky's mind, which were hospitably open to all, he noticed that Sviazhsky was slightly disconcerted ; faint signs of alarm were visible in his eyes, as, though he were afraid Levin would understand him, and he would give him a kindly, good-humoured repulse.⁴

Levin's approach in this matter is theoretical and static and leaves out of account the ubiquitous and inevitable inconsistencies and self contradictions in men. It is obvious that Sviazhsky is a quicker man than Levin and unlike the latter understands practical issues better than theories.

Notes and References

Dates of Tolstoy's works cited in this article are those given by R. F. Christian in *Tolstoy, a Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 1969)

1. See, for example, an unsigned review in *Citizen* (1876), No. 11, which, after elaborately summing up Levin's character and activities, observed, "Such is the personality of the landowner Levin and it is drawn in the novel in great relief ; one should also note that this side of Count Tolstoy's new work might well attract more general attention than the main intrigue between Anna and Vronsky." Quoted in *Tolstoy—the Critical Heritage*, ed. A. V. Knowles (London & Boston, 1978), p. 285. Hereinafter simply cited as *Herit.*
2. "Count Tolstol's [sic,] *Anna Karenina* is a long, intricate, and crowded novel of Russian life. It is really two novels, we might almost say three novels, in one." Unsigned review, "Literary World" (Boston), 17 April, 1886, *Herit.*, p. 340.
3. "As in *War and Peace*, all his characters have a little of him in them, and both Vronsky and Konstantin Levin in turn represent him in some particular aspect just as clearly as Nikolay Rostov, Prince Andrey, or Pierre." *Herit.*, p. 325.

4. *Herit.*, p. 332.
5. *Herit.*, p. 338. Also pp. 346 and 350-51. Sofya Andreyevna, Tolstoy's wife, is on record with the view that Tolstoy had depicted himself in Levin. But a well-informed biographer, Victor Shklovsky, says "Levin has no prototype. He is not Tolstoy, because he is Tolstoy without the power of analysis, without genius. But Levin is endowed with the vision that goes with love." — Victor Shklovsky, *Lev Tolstoy* (Moscow, tr. Olga Shartse, 1978), p. 455.
6. *Herit.*, p. 265.
7. *Herit.*, p. 240.
8. *Herit.*, p. 255.
9. *Herit.*, pp. 31-0-11.
10. Bayley, John, *Tolstoy and the Novel* (London, 1966), p. 190
11. *Op. cit.*, p. 196.
12. *Op. cit.*, p. 201.
13. Speirs, Logan, *Tolstoy and Chekhov* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 127.
14. "I can't defend his opinion", Dolly said, flaring up, 'but I can say that he is a very well-informed man, and if he were here he would be able to give you the answer, though I am not capable of doing so.'" Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* 1874-76, tr. Rosemary Edmonds (Penguin Classics, 1954, 1982 ed.), pp. 663-4.
15. *Op. cit.*, p. 29,
16. *Op. cit.*, p. 30.
17. *Op. cit.*, p. 30.
18. "'With all his faults, one must do him justice', the Princess remarked to Koznyshev as soon as Oblonsky had left them. 'He has the true Russian, Slav nature!'" — *op. cit.*, p. 808.
19. *Op. cit.*, p. 30.
20. *Op. cit.*, p. 110, Tyndall, incidentally, was an author that Tennyson was in the habit of frequently referring to.
21. *Op. cit.*, p. 163. Levin would seem to stand in need of some such sympathetic champion as Browning's Rabbi Ben Ezra, who, in trying to defend his own stance, in effect, sings the apology of the whole human race :

xxiii

Not on the vulgar mass
 Called "work", must sentence pass,
 Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
 O'er which, from level stand,
 The low world laid its hand,
 Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice :

xxiv

But all, the world's coarse thumb
 And finger failed to plumb,
 So passed in making up the main account ;
 Ali instincts immature,
 All purposes unsure,
 That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount :

xxv

Thoughts hardly to be packed
 Into a narrow act,
 Fancies that broke through language and escaped ;
 All I could never be,
 All, men ignored in me,
 This, I was 'worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.
 — Robert Browning, "Rabbi Ben Ezra", *A Selection of Poems*,⁹ ed.
 W. T. Young (Cambridge, 1929), pp. 193-94. Originally published in the *Dramatis Personae* (1864).

22. *Op. cit.*, p. 366.
23. *Op. cit.*, p. 367.
24. *Op. cit.*, p. 367.
25. *Op. cit.*, p. 376.
26. *Op. cit.*, p. 581.
27. *Op. cit.*, p. 819.
28. 29 & 30. *Op. cit.*, p. 820.
31. *Op. cit.*, p. 823.
32. *Op. cit.*, p.
33. *Op. cit.*, p. 829.
34. Shklovsky, *Op., cit.*, pp. 398-408.
35. Shklovsky, *Op. cit.*, pp. 466-72.
36. *Op. cit.*, p. 111.
37. Shklovsky, *Op. cit.*, p. 332.
38. *Op. cit.*, pp. 328-329.
39. Christian, R. F., *Tolstoy, A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 210.
40. *Op. cit.*, p. 183.
41. Rufus W. Mathewson, Jr., *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (Stanford 1958, 1978 ed), p. 16.
42. *Op. cit.*, p. 17.
43. *Anna Karenina*. Part III, ch, 26.

BLACK MISCHIEF : A LESSER COMEDY IN A HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

R. K. DHAR

THE first two novels of Evelyn Waugh preponderated with an exposure of the comic fallacy of mistaking secular change for progress.¹ By the time Waugh came to write *Black Mischief* (1932) at Madresfield, Lord Beauchamp's moated house near Malvern, he had got converted to Roman Catholicism. Its impact on his artistic career, apart from his personal life, is evident in this novel, from the explicit expression of the theme of the non-synonymity of secular change with progress. Though the moral centre of Waugh's irony, the hub of the wheel of life,² already betrayed Catholic characteristics, it now took on an overtly Catholic significance. With the clarity of thought provided by Roman Catholicism, Waugh felt himself well-equipped for the strenuous task of enunciating the theme common to his first two novels in a historical framework. So, he chose to narrate the history of a fictive barbaric nation whose ruler is desirous of translating the delusive Enlightenment and Humanist philosophies of secular progress in to a reality.³

In this paper, an attempt has been made to show how *Black Mischief* (1932) Waugh's third major novel, achieves a remarkable aesthetic unity in the centrality of its 'lesser' comic vision of absurdity, implicit in the circuitous course of Azanian history and in its 'deeper narrative structure', thereby justifying its claim for recognition as an important milestone in Evelyn Waugh's canon of lesser comedies.⁴

Seth, the chief protagonist in this novel, is a true descendant of his grandfather, Amurath the Great. It was Amurath who, driven by the desire of modernising Azamia,⁵ the tribal land of the Wanda and the Sakuyu, embarked on the absurd voyage of circuitous Secular change for the first time. Accordingly, his successes and failures become indicative of the victory and defeat

of Enlightenment historiography which lays great emphasis on the faculty of human reason instead of divine agency as a potent instrument of change. Regarding the first change effected by him — a railway line between Matodi and Debra Dowa, — Waugh writes :

Reluctantly, step by step, barbarism retreated ; the seeds of progress took root and, after years of slow growth, burst finally into flower in the single, narrow-gauge track of the grand Chemin de fer Impérial d' Azanie.⁶

The mock-epic style employed here leaves no room for doubt regarding where the author's sympathies lie. Waugh has no illusions about the extirpation of barbarism with secular change. Besides, it could scarcely be overcome with a change that is incomprehensible to people. The following lines are significant in this regard :

The First few trains caused numerous deaths among the inhabitants, who for some time did not appreciate the speed or strength of this new thing that had come to their country. Presently they became more cautious and the service less frequent.⁷

The second change — the abolition of slavery — trumpeted loudly throughout the capital is a mere eyewash as it was never made known to the real offenders. Though the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion has the semblance of a religious change yet it is not so as the reasons behind it are secular rather than religious. Amurath hoped to ward off European intervention by taking such a step. This change too proved ineffective as it too was never publicised among the people. The overwhelmingly positive response of the European press to these changes is, therefore, not only ludicrous but also derisive of their 'progressive' viewpoint.

The secular changes effected by Amurath see the emergence of Debra Dowa, the capital of Azania, as a modern city afflicted with the malaise that eats into the vitals of most *gesellschaft* social structures. The haphazard jumble of shops, missions, barracks, bungalows, native huts, carcasses of stray animals lying heaped up and puddles of muddy water present a picture of disorganisation and chaos. As these are the signs of barbarity and not of civilisation, it may safely be said that despite the massive efforts for secular

change, Azania has scarcely advanced from its original state of barbarity. Waugh, therefore, conveys suggestively the absurdity of adopting the course of secular change as a means to progress.

When the action of the novel begins, Amurath and his daughter are already dead and Seth, the grandson of Amurath, is locked in a battle with Seyid, the husband of the late Empress, for political control over the island-state. Oxford-educated, Seth has been exposed, in his very youth, to the Enlightenment and Humanist philosophies of secular progress. Inspired thus, he is far more 'dynamic' than his grandfather, Amurath. Appropriately enough, he sees the battle between him and his father, Seyid, as one between 'Progress' and 'Barbarity'.⁸ Waugh suggests the ridiculousness of his belief in the comedy of the 'Tank', the modern weapon of warfare on which he relies excessively. Instead of being used against the enemy, it proves useful only for punishing recalcitrant soldiers who are made to stand within its metallic body in the heat of the tropical sun. That Seth's victory is achieved with the help of 'two very ancient weapons—lies and the long spear'¹⁰ is an adequate rebuff to the concept of secular progress propounded by Enlightenment historiographers. The cannibalistic feast of Seyid's body further reveals the hollowness of Seth's progressive claims.

When acquainted with these facts by his General Connolly, Seth feels the urgency of reforming his barbaric people with the secularised education of the West about which T. S. Eliot has written most perceptively :

All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.¹¹

As a product of this system of education, Seth himself is a figure of fun. In his quixotry of modernisation, Waugh holds up the secular education of the West to ridicule. Besides, in *Decline and Fall* (1928), he had already shown the depravity and anarchy nursed in the so-called temples of learning. Seth, however, mistakes the thin veneer of Western sophistication for progress and contrasts it with the brazen display of savagery by his people. Waiting for the delinquent engine to return, he ponders over it :

My people are a worthless people. I give orders; there is none to obey me. I am like a great musician without an instrument. A

wreched car broadside across the line of my procession ... a royal train without an engine ... goats on the platform ... I can do nothing with these people. The Metropolitan is drunk. Those land-owners giggled when the engine broke away; I must find a man of culture; a modern man ... a representative of progress and the New Age.¹⁴

Modernity, Seth's obsession, has however, already made inroads into Azania. The three Embassies of America, France and Britain are representative of the modernised world in Azania. A careful look at the three persons heading these shows the absurdity of Seth's quest. While the American Ambassador suffers from a false sense of superiority,¹⁵ the French Ambassador carries the burden of excessive suspiciousness on his shoulders, somewhat like Don Quixote suspecting witchcraft in each of his misadventures. The elaborate ritual of his going to bed, couched in a mock-epic style, holds up to ridicule this trait in him. Waugh writes :

M. Ballon ascended the stairs to bed. In his room he first tested the steel shutters, then the lock of the door. Then he went across to the bed ... and examined the mosquito curtains. ... He .. examined the magazine of his revolver and laid it on the chair at his bedside ... He slipped another revolver under his pillow. He tiptoed to the window and called down softly :

Sergeant'.

There was a click of heels in the darkness.

'Excellence'.

'Is all well ?'

'All well,, Excellence'.¹⁶

M. Ballon's deep sense of insecurity shows the western world in a lurid light simultaneously compelling its comparison with the barbaric African nation of Azania, the natural breeding ground of such a feeling.

If the French Ambassador represents one end of the 'dynamic world, Sir Samson Courteney, the British Ambassador, represents the other. Far from exaggerating his fears as the French Ambassador is inclined to do, Sir Courteney flagrantly belittles the gravity of reality, keeping himself safe within a self-woven cocoon of ignorance. When Bishop Goodchild visits Sir Courteney, Mr. Ballon thinks mistakenly enough that the British Ambassador

is very clever to keep himself informed of the activities in Debra Dowa through him. The reality, however, is otherwise. The Bishop goes to Sir Courteney's place to enquire about the possibility of any massacre in the town. And what is ridiculous enough is Sir Courteney's singular imperviousness to his fears. Sir Courteney's reply to Bishop Goodchild's query is characteristic of his nickname, the Envoy Extraordinary :

The Envoy Extraordinary said : 'We seem to have tinned asparagus for luncheon every day ... I can't think why ... I'm so sorry — you were talking about the massacre. Well, I hardly know, I haven't really thought about it ... Yes, I suppose there might be one ... Doesn't do to get worried ... I should have thought we could have grown it ourselves ...'

The Envoy Extraordinary's attitude is that of a man who unconsciously feels himself incapable of changing the disordered and predatory 'dynamic' world and therefore, lets the matters drift without burdening his own mind with the task of changing the direct on of its course. As it is a response fathered by a highly unstable world order, there is no distortion of truth in the depiction of Sir Courteney's personality. By being a product of the 'dynamic' world, he is Waugh's indirect and objective indictment of its progressive claims.

The Envoy's thirteen year old 'silly' daughter, Prudence, is in love with William, the first secretary to the British Legation. Their constant attempts to invent new ways of loving show the superficiality, and consequent insincerity, of their feelings. Given the opportunity, it can easily transfer itself to another person. Such an occasion arises on Basil's arrival. Prudence forgets William and takes to the highly unstable Basil. The theme of cannibalism again rears its head in their idle love-talk. Basil tells Prudence ; "You're a grand girl, Prudence, and I'll like to eat you". To this she replies, "so you shall, my sweet, anything you want". It is gruesomely realised in the denouement when Basil unwittingly consumes his mistress at a cannibal feast. The cannibal instincts portrayed here mock at the progressive claims of the Enlightened and Humanist historiographers, as they show a lack of Western cultural superiority over African barbarism. T. S. Eliot, in *Sweeney Agonistes*, points to a similar lack of progress in the

secular efforts of human society. Aldous Huxley too, in his fiction, has drawn attention to the barbaric potential of modern man.

In a perceptive piece of critical writing, Stephen Jay Greenblatt remarks :

The abortive attempt to modernize, Azania is not a statement of the African nations inability to share in the glories of civilization but a shy and satiric examination of modernity itself. The struggle which Seth envisages as a mortal combat between barbarism and progress is a miserable sham, for Western culture itself is no longer meaningful.¹⁶

By having founded itself on the false basis of secularised Christianity, the Western culture, as was seen in the first two novels, has drifted away from the rock of the Roman Catholic hub of the wheel of life and has, thus, exposed itself to the impermanence that keeps on growing as one moves away from the hub. Greenblatt, however, does not interpret the meaninglessness of Western culture in these terms, he does so within the false framework of temporal reality. He writes :

Those Western ideas which might have given Seth's project real significance have been abandoned. Basil informs Seth : "We have got a much easier job now ... If we'd had to modernize a country then it would have meant" ... 'What is all that ?' asked the Emperor 'Just a few ideas that have ceased to be modern'.¹⁷

The passage on which Greenblatt bases his argument, instead of playing up the meaningful stability of the ideas which would have given Seth's project real significance, exposes the vulnerability of those secular ideas to the change that modern man has been effecting, under the delusion of secular progress. Permanence, according to Waugh, lies only in Roman Catholic values of life. So only they could have given meaning to his project of progress.

Seth, however, lives in blissful ignorance of the reality of the modernised West. He waits for the man who would use the magic wand of accelerated secular change to modernise his nation and thereby, bring it at par with the putative civilisation of the secular West. His choice falls interestingly enough, on Basil Seal, a person who is the very epitome of change and instability. Upon reading about the trouble in Azania, Basil, who has a natural

penchant for rackets, becomes eager to go there. He not only robs an emerald bracelet of his mother who is planning for him a stable career at the Bar but also sinks as low as to beg money of his mistresses, Angela. Only a dynamic person like him could be so unabashed as to do this. It is because of this dynamism in him that Spender discovers in him 'exceptional energy and initiative for an Evelyn Waugh hero.'¹⁸

Basil's encounter with Seth is a meeting of two dynamic characters. Because of his Enlightenment notion of Western superiority,¹⁹ Seth overlooks this similarity. So, when Seth sees Basil 'on his triumphal night in his own capital', he is 'overcome by shyness'.²⁰ While their close association cures Basil of all the illusions of scoring over him, Seth never learns the reality of Basil's dynamic self. It is this inability to grow out of his shell of ignorance that takes the toll of his life at the end of the novel.

Having inducted Basil into his government, Seth's plans of modernisation breathe with life. One of the first tasks undertaken is the construction of the building of the 'Ministry of Modernization' at the site of the old Empress' oratory. Thus, Waugh conveys the secular nature of changes contemplated by the Ministry in its very inception.

That these secular changes are foredoomed to failure, owing to the cyclical nature of secular change, becomes clear in the very first venture of the 'Ministry of Modernization'. Egged on by a rapacious Armenian Financial Secretary, Basil makes the Emperor issue a decree regarding the booting of Connolly's bare-footed soldiers, much against the wishes of the sagacious General. Though Mr. Youkoumian succeeds in lining his purse well, the plan goes haywire in the ironic end of the boots. Connolly's adjutant, who had never 'had much truck with boots before', 'thought they were extra-rations' and accordingly made all his men eat 'the whole bag of tricks'.²¹

The other excursion into modernity, popularisation of birth control, measures, among the natives, has an equally ironic end. An artist, engaged for the purpose, draws up two posters which distinguish the relative fortunes of a small and a large family. The posters captioned, 'WHICH HOME DO YOU CHOOSE?',

are supposed to encourage the natives to have small and contented families. Their effect is, however, the opposite. The people who see the Emperor's juju in the middle of the toiling large family mistake it for the promotion of fecundity.²²

Just as the changes effected by his grandfather had little impact on the transformation of Azanian society, so do his secular endeavours fail in civilising his subjects. According to the Graeco-Roman Humanists, 'whatever happens in history happens as a direct result of human will; that someone is directly responsible for it, to be praised or blamed according as it is a good thing or bad'.²³ They tend to eliminate the role of God and supplant him with 'mere personifications of human agency like the genius of the Emperor'.²⁴ By showing the miscarriage of Seth's modernisation plans, Waugh shows the Humanist claims to be exaggerated and false. Furthermore, by rendering these as comic he draws attention to the futility of achieving progress through secular change.

Seth, however, refuses to see this reality. He pursues his plans of modernisation with greater vigour and zest. His ebullient mind goes about the task of transplanting the Western ideas of progress in his own native state with a pace that is scarcely matched by the countries of their origin. The hurtling pace of this change not only reduces these ideas to half-baked concepts but also plunges Azania into a perpetual state of instability.

The despairing effect of this pace of change on Basil Seal draws into sharp focus the comparative virtues of the Western and the African cultures. By being subject to a lesser pace of change, the West is nearer the hub of the wheel of life compared to Azania which by being subject to a greater pace of change is further from the hub. Nearness to the hub in Waugh means superiority while distance implies decadence. The Western society is, therefore, less decadent than the Azanian society. The linear comparison made here is justifiable as it springs from Waugh's linear concept of real change, one that leads to progress or barbarity. This is where Waugh differs from cyclical historiographers like Spengler.

The instability introduced into Azanian society manifests in anarchy and insurrection at the end of the novel. The Church, the

army and the crafty French Ambassador, with the aid of the Earl of Ngumo, set up a rival candidate for the throne. On the occasion of the Birth Control Gala Day, there is a rebellion. In the struggle that ensues, Seth loses and has to flee along with Viscount Boaz to the Jungles. Debra Dowa's imposed order rips open and the forces of irrationality and barbarity have their way in creating chaos and anarchy. Azania returns, after a long circuitous journey of secular change, to its original state of barbarity. Seth, the champion of Enlightenment historiography, himself meets with an ironic and grotesque end in the jungles.

The circular path of Azanian history brings out the absurdity of man's belief in progress through secular change and Seth is rendered comic for mistaking it for progress. His grotesque end, however, saves him from becoming the object of satire. The error of judgement that the tragic hero in Shakespeare falls a victim to, takes a tragic-comic shape here in the fate of Seth, the deity of change in the novel. Besides, the comparative juxtaposition of the Western and the Azanian societies brings out the linear concept of progress and decline that Waugh espoused. Thus, the novel shows two directions of change, circular and linear; each of them, however, being critical of the secular approach to life. Eric Linklater shows blatant ignorance of Waugh's attitude to change and progress, when he belittles his achievement in the novel by bringing it down to the plane of Restoration comedy:

Mr. Waugh is so abominably subversive as to mock the idea of progress, especially in such manifestations as might be expected to promote, by a One Year Plan, the adoption of modern organization and habits of life in the negroid Empire of Azania; but Mr. Waugh, by living rather on the plane of Restoration Comedy, permits his readers, if, they prefer it, to take his criticism simply as a good joke.⁷⁵

Waugh once said that there 'is no more agreeable position than that of a dissident from a stable society'⁷⁶ which, in his philosophy, implies a Roman Catholic society for civilisation, which 'has no force of its own beyond what is given it from within',⁷⁷ 'came into being through Christianity, and without it has no significance or power to command allegiance'.⁷⁸ The events in the novelistic history of Azania testify to Waugh's belief and also reveal the

vantage point from which he assesses the secular efforts of human society. Ernest Oldmeadow's accusation

There may be books in which sordidness of detail does not overwhelm the spirituality of the pervading idea, but Mr. Waugh's is not one of them. On his dunghill no lily blooms.²²

is, therefore, a reflection not on the book he surveys so maliciously but on his own inability to detect the pervading Christian idea in the objectively narrated history of Azania.

The circular course of Azanian history reinforced by a plot which ends where it began concretises Waugh's comic vision of absurdity against the backdrop of a world that has allowed itself to be deluded by the Enlightenment and Humanist historiographers' claims of achieving progress through secular change. In this respect, *Black Mischief* forms an integral and essential part of the lesser comedies of Evelyn Waugh.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Before writing this novel, Evelyn Waugh had already written two novels : *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *Vile Bodies* (1930). In both, the focus of his artistic attention was on an aesthetic expression of the absurdity of secular change as a means to progress. While in *Decline and Fall* (1928), it is the Enlightenment claims of Britain's progress and superiority that are ridiculed for their lack of truth, it is Adam Fenwick-Symes, in *Vile Bodies* (1930), who is ridiculed for his futile efforts to progress through material aggrandisement, a form of secular change (R. K. Dhar, "Vile Bodies": A Re-appraisal of Waugh's Comic Vision of Life, "The NEHU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. VII. No. 2, April-June, 1989, pp. 11-21).
2. It is towards the end of *Decline and Fall* (1928) that Waugh gives away a clue to the moral centre of his irony. In his discourse on life to Paul Pennyfeather there, Otto Silenus says that, save the hub, the wheel of life is perpetually in a state of cyclical motion like the big wheel at Luna Park. Its effect is so unsettling and absurd that unless a person makes for the stable hub, he would be caught in a meaningless cyclical motion apart from making all out efforts to keep himself straight on the wheel (Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall* Chapman and Hall (1928), rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988, pp. 208-9). With Waugh's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1930, these ideas became

clearer and took on Catholic overtones. The hub of the wheel of life thereafter came to stand for the Roman Catholic Church which alone, according to Waugh, is a symbol of truth and stability in the ever-changing nature of the temporal world (Edward Campion to Gregory Martin in Evelyn Waugh. *Edmond Campion* (Longman's, 1935, rpt. Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 61.

3. The change in the physical setting of this novel has, however, attracted a mixed response from critics. While Gilbert Highet attributes it to the novelist's desire to satirise 'the current idealistic doctrine that all races are brothers under the skin' (Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962, p. 204), Lionel Stevenson opines that it gave Waugh 'equal opportunities for ridiculing Western sophistication and primitive savagery' (Lionel Stevenson, *The History of the English Novel*, Vol. 11, New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1967, p. 354). Stephen Jay Greenblatt, however, sees in it a desire for 'a condemnation far more of the cultivated Westerner than of the African' (Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Evelyn Waugh", *Three Modern Satirists: Waugh, Orwell and Huxley*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965, p. 17). Though David Lodge, too, denies any signs of racial snobbery in it (David Lodge, *Evelyn Waugh*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1971, p. 23), yet neither he nor Greenblatt writes of the novelist's desire to show the futility of secular change in the cyclical history of Azania.
4. In my opinion, Waugh wrote two kinds of comedies: the 'lesser' and the 'greater' comedies. While the central characters in lesser comedies are rendered comic for their misplaced faith in the progressive nature of secular change, those in the greater comedies achieve the ultimate heights of comedy by resurrecting their lives through religious change (R. K. Dhar, 'Brideshead Revisited: A Re-assessment' forthcoming in *Allgarh Journal of English Studies*).
5. Despite Waugh's denials, critics have compared Azania to Ethiopia, which Waugh visited in 1930. A comparative analysis of *Black Mischief* and *Remote People* (1931) shows a number of similarities in situations and places. For instance, the Dierre-Dowa of the latter becomes Debra Dowa in the former (p. 80), the king's soldiers in *Remote People* are without boots (p. 84) as in the novel, and the access to the British Embassy there is shoddy (p. 87), as in this novel. The similarity between the two books has brought the novel the odium of a travelogue which is certainly unjustified keeping in mind the changes that Waugh has effected in the raw materials provided by his personal experience, an artistic vision that the travelogue, *Remote People* (1931), lacks.
6. Evelyn Waugh, *Black Mischief* (Chapman and Hall, 1932), rpt., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, p. 11.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

8. The word 'dynamic', in Waugh, implies the inclination and ability to participate in the world of secular change as opposed to the word 'Static', which indicates inability to do so (R. K. Dhar, 1989, op. cit., p. 11)
9. Evelyn Waugh, 1932, op. cit., pp. 16-17.
10. Seth's victory over Seyid is modelled on a real life incident reported by Waugh as a special correspondent in Addis Adaba to *The Times* of 22 December 1930. Waugh had reported how Lij Yasi, the previous ruler of Ethiopia had been defeated and deposed by the new Emperor Haile Selassie with the help of a disinformation campaign against him, (Evelyn Waugh, "Ethiopia To day : Romance and Reality", *The Times*, 22 December, 1930. In Donat Gallaghered, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh London* : Mothuen, 1983, p. 119).
11. T. S. Eliot, *Selected Poems*, London : Faber and Faber, 1976, p. 107.
12. Evelyn Waugh, 1932, op. cit , pp. 101-2.
13. Ibid., p. 47.
14. Ibid., pp 59-61.
15. Ibid., p. 53.
16. Stephen Jay Greenblatt, op. cit., p. 18.
17. Ibid., p. 18
18. Stephen Spender, "The World of Evelyn Waugh", *The creative Element : A Study of Vision, Despair and Orthodoxy Among Some Modern Writers*, London : Hamish Hamilton, 1953, p. 167.
19. Evelyn Waugh, 1932, op. cit., p 113.
20. Ibid., p. 112.
21. Ibid., pp. 137-38.
22. Ibid., pp. 146-47.
23. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*. Oxford. OUP. 1983, p. 41.
24. Ibid., 42.
25. Erik Linklater in *Listener*, 19 October 1932, p. 576, taken from Martin Stannard (ed), *Evelyn Waugh : The Critical Heritage*, London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 129-30.
26. Evelyn Waugh, "Conservative Manifesto", *Robbery Under Law* (1939), in Donat Gallagher (ed.). *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, London : Methuen, 1983, p. 162.
27. Ibid., p. 161.
28. Jeffrey Heath, *The Picturesque Prison : Evelyn Waugh and his Writing*, London : George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, p. 33.
29. Ernest Oldmeadow, 'Editorial', *Tablet*, 18 February 1933, in Martin Stannard (ed.), op. cit., p. 135.

DOUGLAS GRAY ON CHAUCER AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES *

ASHOKE SEN

[*Professor Douglas Gray, the J. R. R. Tolkien professor of English Literature and Language at the University of Oxford, was in Calcutta during 3 to 5 January, 1991, to deliver the Mohini Mohan Bhattacharya Memorial Lecture at the University of Calcutta.*

Professor Gray, whose visit was sponsored by the British Council, spoke on the manifold aspects of Chaucer and Middle English poetry at Calcutta and Jadavpore Universities.

*An erudite scholar, Professor Douglas Gray (b. 1930) is author of numerous works. His book *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London, 1972) is a standard work on the subject. He has also edited the celebrated anthology *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose* (Oxford, 1985)].*

IS Sir Gawain and the Green Knight a heroic or a religious poem ? Do you accept John Speirs's thesis that it is a poem about vegetation myth ?

* I feel it is primarily not a religious poem, though every bit of evidence suggests that the author was a profoundly religious man. He seems to take great trouble not to have his hero transgressed in any way, and makes sure the hero performs the usual rituals, masses. There is rather a greater stress on that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* than is in a lot of medieval English romances. So I don't think it is primarily religious. Heroic it is in the sense that it has got a hero. Of course, it is a romance rather than an epic, and I think it is concerned really like many other romances with the testing of the hero and his qualities, a test, which in my view he successfully achieves and comes through, though at the cost of some lost dignity

* In an exclusive interview with Ashoke Sen, Professor Gray answered questions on Chaucer and other medieval English poets. The manuscript of the interview has been prepared by Sri Ashoke Sen.

and a growth in self-knowledge. As to Speirs's suggestion, there is a very famous answer to that by C. S. Lewis, in which Lewis makes great fun of the "anthropological approach" as he called it to literature and really tries to laugh it out of court, and indeed did show that the evidence is very sparse. Lewis claimed that if there was a springtime kind of renewal myth behind *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it was well and truly behind, and in no way affected our interpretation of the poem. I think he did dispose of most of Speirs's point in somewhat rough and brutal way.

There are some unanswered questions that seem to me still there, even though the poet himself does not seem to want to give us a direct and final answer to them. I mean the greenness of the Green Knight, for instance. Barbar Polly clearly associates him with an evergreen spirit. According to some critics, he is some sort of an other world being, fairy creature, presumably out of this world, coming into the world of chivalry in order to test it. This suggestion is definitely there. The beheading game itself has some sort of a primitive feel about it. It is not the beautiful kind of courtly game which it is presented as likely to become in the beginning. It turns out to be quite onerous. There are certain mysterious things which are not explained away. The pentangle is quite explicitly given a Christian interpretation. There is an element of mystery even in the giving of new year gifts, which is entirely social and game-like in the poem. The giving of new year gifts was taken from popular medieval superstition. It seems, from what one or two moralists say, to be a kind of superstitious premonition of what is going to happen to you in the next year. I don't think that is anywhere on the surface of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Nor do I know whether the author was aware of all that, but it is odd that these little pieces are still there. It may simply be, as is the case with other medieval romance stories of this kind, that earlier materials which are close to myths have simply gone through a series of transformations. Some of these motifs and scenes are being retained simply because of their strangeness and evocative feel, rather than due to any particular need to continue.

There are other reasons why Speirs's theory will not stand up as he put it. To start with, there is one obvious objection which Lewis did not make: if it is supposed to be a myth of regeneration, why is there no transformation back again at the end? In some of the parallel stories the Green Knight himself asks to be decapitated, and turns back to an ordinary human being, but here they simply say goodbye to one another and on the cold ground. The snow is still there. One finds no suggestion that the waste land, the kind of wilderness, is being transformed into a blooming garden, as is the case in yet another parallel story. So I don't think Speirs really got his facts right.

There exists a school of thought which believes that Sir Gawain and Pearl were written by the same person. Do you subscribe to this view?

* I think it is impossible to prove it, though it may very well be possible. The difficulty is, the external evidence is not quite sufficient. True, it is the same manuscript, same dialect, similar phrases and in some cases an overlap of interest also, but on the other hand the poems are very different in their themes and in the way they treat them. It is perfectly likely, I don't think anybody can be absolutely certain.

Can we apply Freudian principles in interpreting some of the visions in Piers Plowman?

* I would say, with great difficulty, in the case of *Piers Plowman*. I feel Freudian theories could probably be more easily applied to some romances — to their narrative pattern. Visions and dreams are so very clearly used as ways of increasing the dreamer's knowledge, introducing him to spiritual truths, that it is really hard to find any kind of psychological significance in them. Of course, there is a suggestion at the beginning, which is a traditional one in the medieval dream-writing generally, that the person who is to have the dream, is himself in some state of disturbance or perplexity, and the audience expectation clearly is that this will be alleviated through the dream or the dream will in fact illuminate the problems that he wishes to seek counsel for.

Orthodox scholars tend to pooh pooh such interpretations — do they not?

* It is a bit too easy to pooh pooh them, it seems to me. I feel one ought to think about them before dismissing them totally. Although, in the case of Langland (*Piers Plowman*), I would dismiss such an approach. In the case of romances it is more obvious there, because some romances are based on folktales and Freudian interpretations have been applied to folktales. It therefore, is not all too unreasonable to try and do it with romance. The problem is that you have to do a lot of re-writing sometimes. There is a lot of surface decorations which has somehow to be ignored, so that you can get to the underlined essence of the story. That kind of interpretations, of course, is open to objection.

Chaucer is a great narrative poet. Could he have been a dramatic poet, had he been born in a later time?

* I am fairly sure, he would have been. In *Troilus and Criseyde* a surprisingly large proportion of the poem is actually done in direct speech, so in fact it is quite easy to turn it into a play. You can divide it up in scenes, if you so wish, with the entrance of different new characters. There are, of course, passages of narratives and comments from the writer, but sections of it, hundreds of lines at a time, are conducted in direct speech between the characters. And that does seem to me deserve the title 'dramatic'. It also suggests to me that Chaucer in a different age might have been writing for the stage. The medieval theatre, of course, was in full swing in his day, but as we know most of its subjects in England were religious ones. Such theatres were controlled by town-guilds and they used local chaplains as their authors — not literary figures around the court, as Chaucer.

Which Chaucer appeals to you more — Chaucer of the comic or Chaucer, the poet of courtly love?

* Both — as he does them both *equally* well. I think *Troilus and Criseyde* is one of the great courtly poems in the middle ages, but at the same time he is extremely well in the *fabliau*. It has been suggested that he is so good in his treatment of the *fabliau* — particularly the ones set in Oxford and Cambridge, i.e., *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale* respectively — that he is really transforming the genre, though retaining its basic ingredients. The *fabliau*, I suppose in its barest and the most essential form, depends very

much on the plot, and on the turns of the plot, whereas in *The Miller's Tale* particularly, the personalities of the figures involved in the plot become extremely prominent, and indeed feed into its working. So it is much richer, much more dense, much more illusive than the usual kind of fabliau.

Would you call The Merchant's Tale a fabliau ?

* It is usually called so and I think it probably is. It is notoriously difficult to give a very strict definition of the *fabliau*, as it just means a comic story really, and one of the parallels to *The Merchant's Tale* is *The Decameron*, which is another work that heavily draws on contemporary *fabliau*. I shall call it a *fabliau* though it is much elaborated in *The Merchant's Tale*, especially in the introduction. Its allusions are very literary. It is very unlike *The Miller's Tale* or *The Reeve's Tale*. *The Shipman's Tale* is much more straightforward and simple, and that is closer to the typical French *fabliau*. He seems to have liked to experimenting with that form.

Should we take The Nun's Priest's Tale as a straightforward fabliau or is it to be viewed as a Christian allegory ?

* I would take it as a straightforward animal story or fable, primarily comic in its intention. I don't myself feel at all convinced by attempts to read a particular Christian or religious significance in it. That seems to me to be a very arbitrary interpretation. On the other hand, animal fables do traditionally have a moral, and *The Nun's Priest's Tale* does have a moral. As such it is a moral story. It is about vain, glory and pride, I suppose. But it is done very lightly, and though in a sense it is a serious moral, the whole story, I think, is a game, a comedy.

What would you say, was Chaucer's view on marriage as an institution ? Does the marriage-group tales give us any indication ?

* It is very difficult to say what his total view to anything was, because he was very much a dramatic writer, and you tend to get different views coming up in different tales. There are, of course, cases where he seems to have a very high opinion of marriage — at the end of *The Knight's Tale*, for instance, as well in *The Franklin's Tale*, where you have a kind of idealized marriage on more or less

philosophical grounds. That seems to me to be representing a kind of idealized balance of service and sovereignty. There is a kind of moderation and accord there. The couple are nicely matched, which is conspicuously absent in the fabliau marriages, like that of old January and young May or the old carpenter and the young Alison, in *The Miller's Tale*. But I think he has got a pretty sharp comic eye for what he calls the woe in many marriages as well. His audience obviously would have expected some sort of fun and game from a marriage like that of January and May. What they get actually is a bitter kind of fun and game, not like the rather happy-go-lucky, open-air sort of fun and games that you get in *The Miller's Tale*.

Where would you say his sympathy lay in The Merchant's Tale.

* He is very detached in *The Merchant's Tale*, though you certainly do feel sympathetic to young May, when she is in bed with the old husband. On the other hand, May's scheming with the young squire Damian, especially when she drops the love letter into the privy, perhaps moves your sympathy a bit from her, and the blindness of her old husband does that too. I think it is fairly detached. On the other hand, Alison in *The Miller's Tale* seems to have a good deal of sympathy, and is the one character who escapes entirely unscathed in the end of it.

In today's lecture (3rd January) at the University you talked about Chaucer's playing with "medieval stereotypes". In The Miller's Tale is Chaucer taking the medieval technique of descriptio feminae upside down in the description of Alison ?

* Yes, and it is an adaptation particularly for the role Alison has to play. It is done in a complicated and subtle way, because everybody points out the farmyard images — the dove on the barn, and many other things like that later on — but in fact it is not a straightforwardly rustic farmyard and all that. There is a rather genuinely erotic description of Alison's clothes, which is very cleverly done. This is leading the audience to expect some sort of entertaining story of lust to follow. And of course, it is very strikingly in contrast with the description of the unsuccessful suitor Absalon. He is a creature of art and very particular about his appearance. He is a dandy and goes about his wooing in a very flamboyant and academic way.

If we can move from the ridiculous to the sublime — would you say in The Knight's Tale in terms of the story, perhaps Palamon deserves Emelye more than Arcite does ?

* I think they are evenly balanced, and no answer is giving to this question. Of course, it is a question which is not asked really, though it is a very reasonable one for anybody to ask. I think they are deliberately kept in balance. In fact both of them get what they want. It is no idle chance that they go to the temples of their respective deities. From the beginning of the poem we learn that Palamon is a genuine servant of Venus, and he imagines Emelye to be a goddess, Arcite, on the other hand, is a genuine servant of Mars. He asks for victory, which is what he gets, Palamon just wants Emelye, and he gets her. In the end they are equally rewarded. I think keeping them together is fairly important. It is a very patterned story which makes it unusual in Chaucer. There is no attempt in there what we call characterization. As certain points, though, differentiating factors, like the association of different gods, crop up, but when we begin to think that Palamon is noticeably different from Arcite, all at once they are brought together again, and the same kind of language is used at them both, as if this is typical. I think in the larger structure of the poem this is quite important, and actually rectifies what is an oddity in Boccaccio. In the Boccaccio version of the story, it is the tragedy of Arcite, and at the end when his spirit soars to heaven — it is the passage which Chaucer uses in *Troilus and Creseyde* — the coda at the end with the marriage of Emelye and Palamon seems something of an afterthought. As opposed to that, in Chaucer, I get the impression that he somehow, is making his way towards something like one of Shakespeare's last plays, where if you stop at a certain point you are left with a tragedy, but if you go on and see the survivors picking up the pieces and continuing, you are left with quite a different sort of opinion. I think that is what happens in *The Knight's Tale*.

Are not some of Chaucer's Tales Indian in origin ?

* Some certainly are. *The Pardoner's Tale* is supposed to be one of the Buddhist stories moved across, and there are parallels to many others. There is no doubt that some of the great Western

story collections did come through Arabia, and ultimately from India. The Buddhist stories are very easily adaptable to Christian themes, for they quite often are concerned with disengagement from the world and flesh and so on, and are easily made Christian.

Why is Chaucer still relevant to us ?

* I think he does entertain and encourage us to look at life with a sceptical and comic eye, and to puncture pretension. He gives the impression of a sort of writer who is struggling to understand what the human condition is both in its serious and frivolous aspects. He asks about the purpose of life, as Arcite does, while he is dying, "What is this world ? What does man ask to have ?"

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(Published Annually in Bengali)

Edited by Ujjwal Kumar Majumdar

R. N. 30080/75

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India

This number edited by
AMITABHA SINHA

Editor-in-Chief
SROBONA MUNSHI

Published by
DILIP KUMAR MUKHERJEE
on behalf of the University of Calcutta
at Asutosh Building, Calcutta-700 073
and printed by him at

B. B. Co.
(Printing Division)
4, Ram Ratan Bose Lane
Calcutta-700 004

Price : Rs. 15.00

Copies are sold at the Calcutta University Publications Sales Counter,
Asutosh Building, Calcutta-700 073.